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# THE JESUS PROBLEM

A RE-STATEMENT OF THE MYTH THEORY

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

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# THE HISTORICAL JESUS

## A SURVEY OF POSITIONS

BY  
JOHN M. ROBERTSON  
"

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## PREAMBLE

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THE problem of the historicity of the Jesus of the Gospels has been discussed by me in large sections of two bulky books, which in other sections deal with matters only indirectly connected with this, while even the sections directly devoted to the problem cover a good deal of mythological and anthropological ground which not many readers may care to master. The "myth theory" developed in them, therefore, may not be readily grasped even by open-minded readers; and the champions of tradition, of whatever school, have a happy hunting-ground for desultory misrepresentation and mystification. It has been felt to be expedient, therefore, by disinterested readers as well as by me, to put the problem in a clearer form and in a more concise compass. The process ought to involve some logical improvement, as the mythological investigation made in CHRISTIANITY AND MYTHOLOGY had been carried out independently of the anthropological inquiry made in PAGAN CHRISTS, and the theory evolved may well require unification. In particular, the element of *Jewish* mythology

calls for fuller development. And the highly important developments of the myth theory by Professor Drews and Professor W. B. Smith have to be considered with a view to co-ordination.

To such a re-statement, however, certain preliminary steps are necessary. The ground needs to be cleared (1) of *a priori* notions as to the subject matter ; (2) of mistaken opinions as to a supposed "consensus of critics"; and (3) of uncritical assumptions as to the character of the Gospel narratives.

Writers who have not gone very deeply into problems of normal history, however they may have specialized in the Biblical, are still wont to assert that the historicity of non-supernatural data in the Sacred Books is on all fours with that of the subject matter of "profane" history. Indeed it is still common to hear it claimed that the Resurrection is as well "attested" as the assassination of Julius Cæsar, or even better. In exactly the same tone and spirit did the traditionalists of a previous generation assert that the stoppage of the sun and moon in the interest of Joshua was better attested than any equally ancient historical narrative. Those who have decided to abandon the supernatural reduce the claim, of course, to the historicity of the Trial and Crucifixion; but as to these they confidently repeat the old formulas. Yet in point of fact they have made no such critical scrutiny of



even these items as historians have long been used to make, with destructive results, into many episodes of ancient history—for instance, the battle of Thermopylæ and the founding of the Spartan constitution by Lycurgus. Men who affect to dismiss the myth theory as an ungrounded speculation are all the while taking for granted the historicity of a record which is a mere tissue of incredibilities.

It has been justly remarked that serious risk of error is set up even by the long-current claim of naturalist critics to “treat the Bible like any other book.” Even in their meaning the phrase should have run: “like any other Sacred Book of antiquity”; inasmuch as critical tests and methods are called for in the scrutiny of such books which do not apply in the case of others. But inasmuch, further, as the Christian Sacred Books form a problem by themselves, a kind of scrutiny which in the case of other books of cult-history might substantially reveal all the facts may here easily fail to do so.

The unsuspecting student, coming to a narrative in which supernatural details are mingled with “natural,” decides simply to reject the former and take as history what is left. It is the method of the amateur mythologists of ancient Greece, derided by Socrates, and chronically resuscitated in all ages by men seeking short cuts to certitude where they have no right to any. If the narrative of the Trial

and Crucifixion, thus handled, is found to be still incredible in point of time-arrangement, the adaptor meets the difficulty by reducing the time-arrangement to probability and presenting the twice redacted result as "incontestable" history. All this, as will be shown in the following pages, is merely a begging of the question. A scientific analysis points to a quite different solution, which the naïf "historical" student has never considered.

He is still kept in countenance, it is true, by "specialists" of the highest standing. The average "liberal" theologian still employs the explanatory method of Toland; and anthropologists still offer him support. Thus Sir James Frazer, by far the most learned collector of mytho-anthropological lore in his age, positively refuses to apply to the history of the Christian cult his own express rule of mythology—formulated before him<sup>1</sup> but independently reiterated by him—that "all peoples have invented myths to explain why they observed certain customs," and that a graphic myth to explain a rite is presumptively "a simple transcript of a ceremony"; which is the equivalent of the doctrine of Robertson Smith, that "in almost every case the myth was derived from the ritual, and not the ritual from the myth," and of the doctrine of K. O. Müller that "the mythus sprang from the

<sup>1</sup> See *Christianity and Mythology*, 2nd ed. p. 179, *note*.

worship, and not the worship from the mythus." What justification Sir James can give for his refusal to act on his own principles is of course a matter for full and careful consideration. But at least the fact that he *has* to justify the refusal to apply in a most important case one of the best-established generalizations of comparative mythology is not in this case a recommendation of the principle of authority to scientific readers.

General phrases, then, as to how religions *must* have originated in the personal impression made by a Founder are not only unscientific presuppositions but are flatly contradictory, in this connection, of a rule scientifically reached in the disinterested study of ancient hierology in general.

It is a delusion, again, to suppose, as do some scholarly men, that there is such a consensus of view among New Testament scholars as to put out of court any theory that cancels the traditionalist assumption of historicity which is the one position that most of them have in common. As we shall see, the latest expert scholarship, professionally recognized as such, makes a clean sweep of their whole work; but they themselves, by their insoluble divisions, had already discredited it. Any careful collection of their views will show that the innumerable and vital divergences of principle and method of the various schools, and their constant

and emphatic disparagement of each other's conclusions, point rather to the need for a radically different theory and method. A theory, therefore, which cancels their conflicts by showing that all the data are reducible to order only when their primary assumption is abandoned, is entitled to the open-minded attention of men who profess loyalty to the spirit of science.

There is need, thirdly, to bring home even to many readers who profess such loyalty, the need for a really critical study of the Gospels. I have been blamed by some critics because, having found that sixty years' work on the documents by New Testament scholars yielded no clear light on the problem of origins, I chose to approach that by way (1) of mythology, (2) of extra-evangelical literature and sect-history, and (3) of anthropology. The question of the order and composition of the Gospels, in the view of these critics, should be the first stage in the inquiry.

Now, for the main purposes of the myth-theory, the results reached by such an investigator as Professor Schmiedel were quite sufficient; and though at many points textual questions had to be considered, it seemed really not worth while to discuss in detail the quasi-historical results claimed by the exegetes. But it has become apparent that a number of readers who claim to be "emancipated"



have let themselves be put off with *descriptions* of the Gospel-history when they ought to have read it attentively for themselves. A confident traditionalist, dealt with hereinafter, writes of the "pretentious futilities into which we so readily drop when we talk about them [the Gospels] instead of reading them." The justice of the observation is unconsciously but abundantly illustrated by himself; and he certainly proves the need for inducing professed students to read with their eyes open.

Early in 1914 there was published a work on *THE HISTORICAL CHRIST*, by Dr. F. C. Conybeare, in which, as against the myth hypothesis, which he vituperatively assailed, a simple perusal of the Gospel of Mark (procurable, as he pointed out, for one penny) was confidently prescribed as the decisive antidote to all doubts of the historicity of the central figure. The positions put were the conventional ones of the "liberal" school. No note was taken of the later professional criticism which, without accepting the myth-theory, shatters the whole fabric of current historicity doctrine. But that is relatively a small matter. In the course of his treatise, Dr. Conybeare asserted three times over, with further embellishments, that in the Gospel of Mark Jesus is "presented quite naturally as the son of *Joseph and his wife* Mary, and we learn quite incidentally the names of his brothers

and sisters." Dr. Conybeare's printers' proofs, he stated, had been read for him by Professor A. C. Clark. I saw, I think, fully twenty newspaper notices of the book; and in not a single one was there any recognition of the gross and thrice-repeated blunder above italicized, to modify the chorus of uncritical assent. A professed Rationalist repeated and endorsed Dr. Conybeare's assertion. Needless to say, not only did Dr. Conybeare not mention that Joseph is never named in Mark, he never once alluded to the fact that in the same Gospel Mary is presented as *not* the mother of Jesus; and the brothers and sisters, by implication, as *not* his brothers and sisters.

When aggressive scholars and confident reviewers thus alike reveal that they have not read the Gospels with the amount of attention supposed to be bestowed on them by an intelligent Sunday-school teacher, it is evidently inadvisable to take for granted any general critical preparation even among rationalistic readers. Before men can realize the need for a new theoretic interpretation of the whole, they must be invited to note the vital incongruities (as apart from miracle stories) in each Gospel singly, as the lay Freethinkers of an earlier generation did without pretending to be scholars.

Those Rationalists are ill-advised who suppose that, in virtue of having listened to latter-day publicists

who profess to extract a non-supernatural "religion" *from* the supernaturalisms of the past, they have reached a higher and truer standpoint than that of the men who made sheer truth their standard and their ideal. Really scholarly and scrupulous advocates of theism are as zealous to expose the historical truth as the men who put that first and foremost; it is the ethical sentimentalists who put the question of historic truth on one side. The fact that some men of scientific training in other fields join at times in such complacent constructions does not alter the fact that they are non-scientific. The personal equation even of a man of science is not science. On these as on other sides of the intellectual life, "opinion of store is cause of want," as Bacon has it.

Some of us who in our teens critically read the sacred books first and foremost to clear our minds on the general question of supernaturalism, and then proceeded to try, with the help of the documentary scholars, to trace the history of religion as matter of anthropology and sociology, had the experience of being told by Professor Huxley, whose own work we had followed, that we were still at the standpoint of Voltaire. Later we had the edification of seeing Huxley expatiate upon topics which had long been stale for Secularist audiences, and laboriously impugn the story of the Flood and

the miracle of the Gadarene swine in discursive debate with Gladstone, even making scientific mistakes in the former connection.

In view of it all, it seems still a sound discipline to treat all opinions as for ever open to revision, and at the same time to doubt whether the acceptance of any popular formula will place us in a position to disparage unreservedly all our critical predecessors. If we find reason to dismiss as inadequate the conclusions of many scholars of the past, orthodox and heterodox, we are not thereby entitled to speak of the best of them otherwise than as powerful minds and strenuous toilers, hampered by some of their erroneous assumptions in the task of relieving their fellows of the burden of others.

It is precisely the habituation of the professional scholars to working in a special groove that has so retarded the progress of New Testament criticism. The re-discussion of the historicity question that has followed upon the modern exposition of the myth-theory has involved the reiteration by the historicity school of a set of elementary claims from the long-discredited interpolation in Josephus and the pagan "testimonies" of Suetonius and Tacitus; and Professor W. B. Smith has had to meet these with a detailed rebuttal such as used to be made—of course with less care and fullness—on the ordinary English Secularist platform forty or even seventy



years ago. Less advanced scholars once more begin to recognize the nullity of the argument from the famous passage in the *ANNALS* of Tacitus,<sup>1</sup> which was clear to so many unpretending freethinkers in the past; and to other *Gelehrten vom Fach* it has to be again pointed out that the *impulsore Chresto* of Suetonius, so far from testifying to the presence of a Christian multitude at Rome under Nero—a thing so incompatible with their own records—is rather a datum for the myth-theory, inasmuch as it posits a cult of a Chrēstos or Christos out of all connection with the “Christian” movement.

The passage in Josephus was given up long ago by hundreds of orthodox scholars as a palpable interpolation, proved as such by the total silence in regard to it of early Fathers who would have rejoiced to cite it if it had been in existence. The device of supposing it to be a Christian modification of a different testimony by Josephus is a resort of despair, which evades altogether the fact of the *rupture of context* made by the passage—a feature only less salient in the paragraph of Tacitus. But even if there were no reason to suspect the latter item of being a late echo *from* Sulpicius Severus, who

<sup>1</sup> That is, even supposing the *Annals* to be genuine. Professor W. B. Smith speaks of a contention “of late” that they are forged by Poggio Bracciolini, but refers only to the work of Ross, 1878. The thesis has been far more efficiently maintained in a series of works by Hochart (1890, etc.), which are worth Professor Smith’s attention.

is assumed to have copied it, nothing can be proved from it for the historicity of the Gospel Jesus, inasmuch as it does but set forth from a hostile standpoint the ordinary Christian account of the beginnings of the cult. Those who at this time of day found upon such data are further from an appreciation of the evidential problem than were their orthodox predecessors who debated the issue with Freethinkers half a century ago.

I have thought it well, then, to precede a re-statement of the "myth-theory" with a critical survey in which a number of preliminary questions of scientific method and critical ethic are pressed upon those who would deal with the main problem aright; and a certain amount of controversy with other critical schools is indulged in by way of making plain the radical weakness of all the conventional positions. The negative criticism, certainly, will not establish in advance the positive theory: that must meet the ordeal of criticism like every other. But the preliminary discussion may at once serve to free from waste polemic the constructive argument and guard readers against bringing to that a delusive light from false assumptions.

A recent and more notorious exhibition of "critical method" by Dr. Conybeare has satisfied me that it is needless to offer any further systematic exposure of the nullity of his treatise, with which

I had dealt at some length in THE LITERARY GUIDE. His memorable attack upon the Foreign Secretary, and his still more memorable retraction, may enable some of his laudatory reviewers to realize the kind of temper and the kind of scrutiny he brings to bear upon documents and theories that kindle his passions. All that was relevant in his constructive process was really extracted, with misconceptions and blunders and exaggerations, from the works of a few scholars of standing who, however inconclusive their work might be, set him a controversial example which he was unable to follow. In dealing with them, I have the relief of no longer dealing with him. As to the constructive argument from comparative mythology, anthropology, and hierology, attacked by him and others with apparently no grasp of the principles of any of these sciences, objections may be best dealt with incidentally where they arise in the restatement of the case.

For the rest, I can conceive that some will say the second year of the World War is no time for the discussion even of a great problem of religious history. I answer that the War has actually been made the pretext for endless religious discussions of the most futile kind, ranging between medieval miracle-mongering and the lowest forms of journalistic charlatanism, with chronic debates on theism

and on the military value of faith and prayer. The newspaper discussions on theism, in particular, reveal a degree of philosophic *naïveté* on the theistic side which seems to indicate that that view of the universe has of late years been abandoned by most men capable of understanding the logical problem. When dispute plays thus uselessly at the bidding of emotion there must be some seniors, or others withheld from war service, who in workless hours would as lief face soberly an inquiry which digs towards the roots of the organized religion of Europe. If the end of the search should be the conviction that that system took shape as naturally as any other cult of the ancient world, and that the sacrosanct records of its origin are but products of the mythopœic faculty of man, the time of war, with its soul-shaking challenge to the sense of reality, may not be the most unfit for the experience.



# THE HISTORICAL JESUS

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## CHAPTER I

### THE SNARE OF PRESUPPOSITION

HE who would approach with an alert mind such a question as that of the historic actuality of the Gospel Jesus would do well to weigh a preliminary warning. Though after four hundred years of chronic scientific discovery all men are supposed to know the intellectual danger of a confident and foregone rejection of new theories, it is scarcely likely that the vogue of such error is at an end. After all, apart from the special experience in question, and from the general effect of the spread of "science," the average psychosis of men is not profoundly different from what it was in the two centuries which passed before the doctrines of Copernicus found general acceptance. Not many modern novelties of thought can so reasonably be met with derision as was the proposition that the earth moves round the sun.

Let the ingenuous reader try to make the supposition that he had been brought up in ignorance of that truth, and without any training in astronomy, and that in adolescence or mature years it had been

casually put to him as a non-authoritative suggestion. Would he have been quick to surmise that the paradox might be truth? Let him next try to imagine that he had been educated by an eccentric guardian in the Ptolemaic creed, which accounted so plausibly for so many solar and stellar phenomena, and that until middle life he had been kept unaware of the Copernican heresy. Can he be sure that, meeting it not as an accredited doctrine but as a novel hypothesis, he would have been prompt to recognize that it was the better solution? If he can readily say Yes, I know not whether his confidence is enviable or otherwise. Reading in Sylvester's translation of the *DIVINE WEEKS* of Du Bartas, which had such vogue in the days of James VI, the confident derision and "confutation" of the heliocentric theory, I really cannot be sure that had I lived in those days I should have gone right where Bacon went wrong.

To a mere historical student, not conscious of any original insight into the problems of nature, there ought to be something chastening in the recollection that every great advance in the human grasp of them has been hotly or hilariously denounced and derided; and that not merely by the average ignoramus, but by the mass of the experts. It was not the peasants of Italy who refused to look through Galileo's telescope—they were not invited to; it was the academics, deep in Aristotle. It was not the laity who distinguished themselves by rejecting Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood; it was all the doctors above forty then living, if we

can believe a professional saying. And it was not merely the humdrum Bible-readers who scouted geology for generations, or who laughed consumedly for decades over the announcement that Darwin made out men to be "descended from monkeys." That theory, as it happened, had been unscientifically enough propounded long before Darwin; and, albeit not grounded upon any such scientific research as served to establish the Darwinian theory in a generation, yet happened to be considerably nearer rationality than the Semitic myth which figured for instructed Christendom as the absolute and divinely revealed truth on the subject. A recollection of the hate and fury with which geologists like Hugh Miller repelled the plain lesson of their own science when it was shown to clash with the sacred myth, and a memory of the roar of derision and disgust which met Darwin, should set reasonable men on their guard when they find themselves faced by propositions which can hardly seem more monstrous to this generation than those others did to our fathers and grandfathers.

It is difficult, again, without suggesting contempt of that scholarship which as concerning historical problems is the equivalent of experimental research in science, to insist aright upon the blinding tendency of pure scholarship in the face of a radically innovating doctrine. Without scholarly survey no such doctrine can maintain itself. Yet it is one of the commonest of experiences to find the accredited scholars among the last to give an intelligent hearing to a new truth. Only for a very few was skill

in the Ptolemaic astronomy a good preparation towards receiving the Copernican. The errors of Copernicus—the inevitable errors of the pioneer—served for generations to establish the Ptolemaists in theirs. And where religious usage goes hand-in-hand with an error, not one man in a thousand can escape the clutch of the double habit.

Hence the special blackness of the theological record in the history of culture. In the present day the hideous memory of old crimes withholds even the clerical class as a whole from the desire to employ active persecution ; but that abstention—forced in any case—cannot save the class from the special snare of the belief in the possession of fixed and absolute truth. Since the day when Tyndale was burned for translating the Sacred Books, English Christians have passed through a dozen phases of faith, from the crassest evangelicalism to the haziest sentimentalism, and in all alike they have felt, *mutatis mutandis*, the same spontaneous aversion to the new doctrine that disturbs the old. Who will say that the stern Tyndale, had he ever been in power, would not have made martyrs in his turn? The martyr Latimer had applauded the martyrdom of Anabaptists. The martyred Cranmer had assented to martyrdoms in his day, though a man forgiving enough in respect of his own wrongs. And if the educated Christians of to-day have reached a level at which they can recognize as old delusions not only the beliefs in relics and images and exorcisms, once all sacrosanct, but the “literal” acceptance of Semitic and Christian myths and



miracle-stories, to whom do they think they owe the deliverance? To their accredited teachers? Not so.

No false belief from which men have been delivered since the day of Copernicus has been dismissed without strenuous resistance from men of learning, and even from men of vigorous capacity. The belief in witchcraft was championed by Bodin, one of the most powerful minds of his day; Glanvill, who sought to maintain it in England after the Restoration, was a man of philosophical culture and a member of the Royal Society; and he had the countenance of the Platonist Henry More and the chemist Boyle. So great a man as Leibnitz repulsed the cosmology of Newton on the score that it expelled God from the universe. It was not professional theologians who invented the "higher criticism" of the Pentateuch, any more than they introduced geology. Samuel Parvish, the Guildford bookseller, who discovered in the days of Walpole that Deuteronomy belonged to the seventh century B.C., is not recorded to have made any clerical converts; and Astruc, the Parisian physician who began the discrimination between the Jehovistic and Elohist sources in Genesis in 1753, made no school in his country or his time. Voltaire, no Hebraist, demonstrated clearly enough that the Pentateuchal tale of the tabernacle in the wilderness was a fiction; but three toiling generations of German specialists passed the demonstration by, till a Zulu convert set the good Bishop Colenso upon applying to the legend the simple tests of his secular arithmetic. Then the experts began slowly to see the point.

## CHAPTER II

### MODES OF CONSERVATIVE FALLACY

To all such reminders the present-day expert will reply, belike, that he does not need them. He, profiting by the past, can commit no such errors. And yet, however right the present members of the apostolic succession of truth-monopolists may be, there is an astonishing likeness in their tone and temper over the last heresy to that of their predecessors, down to the twentieth generation. Anger and bluster, boasting and scolding, snarl and sneer, come no less spontaneously to the tongues of the professional defender of the present minimum of creed than they did to those of the full-blooded breed of the ages of the maximum, or of Calvin and Bonner. From the defence of the "real presence" of the God to that of the bare personal existence of the Man is a long descent; but, there is a singular sameness in the manner of the controversy. As their expert ancestors proved successively the absolute truth of the corporal presence in the wafer, or the humanity of the Son against those who dubbed him merely divine, or his divinity against those who pronounced him merely human, or the inerrancy of the Gospels against the blasphemers who pointed out the contradictions, or the historic certainty of the miracles and the Virgin Birth and the Resur-

rection and the Ascension against the "materialists" who put such Christian myths on a level with Pagan, so do the expert demonstrators of the bare historicity of the now undeified God establish by vituperation and derision, declamation and contempt, the supreme certainty of the minimum after all the supernatural certainties are gone. Even as Swiss patriots undertook to demonstrate "somebody" and "something" behind the legend of William Tell when it had ceased to be possible to burn men at the stake for exposing the apple-myth, so do the descendants of the demonstrators of the real presence now go about to make clear the real existence.

I speak, of course, of the ruck of the vindicators, not of the believers; and Professor Schmiedel and M. Loisy, I trust, will not suspect me of classing them with men many of whom are as hostile to them as to the thesis which those scholars seek by rational methods to confute. Professor Schmiedel has even avowed that a proof of the non-historicity of the Gospel Jesus would not affect his inner religious opinions; and such high detachment has been attained to by others. That civilized scholars credit, and might at a pinch maintain in debate, the historicity of the Gospel Jesus as calmly as they might the historicity of Lycurgus against its impugnors, I am well aware. And to such readers, if I have the honour to obtain any, I address not a warning but an appeal. There is an attitude towards the problem which incurs no reproach on the score of tone and temper, and which will naturally recommend itself all the more to men of real culture, but

which yet, I think, only illustrates in another way the immense difficulty of all-round intellectual vigilance. Let me give an example in an extract from a rather noteworthy pronouncement upon the question in hand :—

Of Paul's divine Master no biography can ever be written. We have a vivid impression of an unique, effulgent personality. We have a considerable body of sayings which *must be genuine because they are far too great to have been invented by His disciples*, and, for the rest, whatever royal robes and tributes of devotion the Church of A.D. 70-100 thought most fitting for its king. The Gospels are the creation of faith and love: faith and love hold the key to their interpretation. (Canon Inge, art. "St. Paul" in *Quarterly Review*, Jan., 1914, p. 45.)

I am not here concerned to ask whether the closing words are the expression of an orthodox belief; or what orthodoxy makes of the further proposition that "With St. Paul it is quite different. He is a saint without a luminous halo." The idea seems to be that concerning the saint without a nimbus we can get at the historical truth, while in the other case we cannot—a proposition worth orthodox attention. But what concerns the open-minded investigator is the logic of the words I have italicized. It is obvious that they proceed (1) on the assumption that what non-miraculous biography the Gospels give is in the main absolutely trustworthy—that is to say, that the accounts of the disciples and the teaching are historical; and (2) on the assumption that we are historically held to the traditional view that the Gospel sayings originated with the alleged Founder as they purport. It is



necessary to point out that this is not a licit historical induction. Even Canon Inge by implication admits that not all the Gospel sayings have the quality which he regards as certifying authenticity; and on no reasonable ground can he claim that the others must have been "invented by the disciples." The alternative is spurious. No one is in a position to deny that any given saying may have been invented by non-disciples. In point of fact, many professional theologians are agreed in tracing to outside sources some tolerably fine passages, such as the address to Jerusalem (Mt. xxiii, 37; Lk. xiii, 34). The critics in question do not ascribe that deliverance to inventive disciples; they infer it to have been a non-Christian document. Many other critics, again, now pronounce the whole Sermon on the Mount—regarded by Baur as signally genuine—a compilation from earlier Hebrew literature, Biblical and other. Which then are the "great" sayings that could not be thus accounted for? Without specification there can be no rational discussion of the problem; and even the proposition about the exegetic function of "faith and love" affects to be in itself rational.

The plain truth would seem to be that Canon Inge has formed for himself no tenable critical position. He has merely reiterated the fallacy of Mill, who in his *Three Essays on Religion* (pp. 253–54) wrote:—

Whatever else may be taken away from us by rational criticism, Christ is still left; a unique figure, not more unlike all his precursors than all

his followers, even those who had the direct benefit of his personal teaching. It is of no use to say that Christ as exhibited in the Gospels is not historical, and that we know not how much of what is admirable has been superadded by the tradition of his followers. The tradition of followers suffices to insert any number of marvels, and may have inserted all the miracles which he is reputed to have wrought. But who *among his disciples or among their proselytes* was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee; as certainly not St. Paul, whose character and idiosyncrasies were of a totally different sort; still less the early Christian writers, in whom nothing is more evident than that the good which was in them was all derived, as they always professed that it was derived, from the higher source. What *could* be added and interpolated by a disciple we may see in the mystical parts of St. John, matter imported from Philo and the Alexandrian Platonists and put into the mouth of the Saviour in long speeches about himself such as the other Gospels contain not the slightest vestige of, though pretended to have been delivered on occasions of the deepest interest and when his principal followers were all present; most prominently at the last supper. The East was full of men who could have stolen (!) any quantity of this poor stuff, as the multitudinous Oriental sects of Gnostics afterwards did. But about the life and sayings of Jesus there is a stamp of personal originality combined with profundity of insight which, if we abandon the idle expectation of finding scientific precision where something very different was aimed at, must place the Prophet of Nazareth, even in the estimation of those who have no belief in his inspiration, in the very first rank of men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast. When this pre-eminent genius is combined with the qualities of probably the greatest moral

reformer, and martyr to that mission, who ever existed on earth, religion [*sic*] cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity..... Add that, to the conception of the rational sceptic, it remains a possibility that Christ actually was what he supposed himself to be—not God, for he never made the smallest pretension to that character, and would probably have thought such a pretension as blasphemous as it seemed to the men who condemned him—but a man charged with a special, express, and unique commission from God to lead mankind to truth and virtue.....

*Ein historischer Kopf hatte er nicht*, is a German economist's criticism of Mill which I fear will have to stand in other fields than that of economics. The man who wrote this unmeasured dithyramb can never have read the Gospels and the Hebrew books with critical attention; and can never have reflected critically upon his own words in this connection. The assumption that "the fishermen of Galilee" could not have attained to thoughts which are expressly alleged to have been put forth by an untaught carpenter of Galilee is on the face of it a flight of thoughtless declamation. Had Mill ever critically read the Old Testament and the Apocrypha, he must have been aware that the main precepts of the Sermon on the Mount, which are presumably among the unspecified objects of his panegyric, were all there beforehand. Had he taken the trouble to investigate before writing, he could have found in Hennell's *Inquiry* (1838), which popularized the old research of Schoettgen; in Nork's *Rabbinische Quellen und Parallelen* (1839); and in

*Les Origines du Sermon de la Montagne* by Hippolyte Rodrigues (1868), a copious demonstration of the Jewish currency of every moral idea in the Christian document, often in saner forms. And he ought to have known from his own reading that the doctrine of forgiveness for injuries, which appears to be the main ground for the customary panegyric of the Sermon, was common to Greeks and Romans before the Gospels were compiled. From the duty of giving alms freely—which is repeatedly laid down in the Old Testament—to that of the sin of concupiscence and the wrongness of divorce for trivial causes, every moral idea in the Sermon had been formulated alike by Jews and Gentiles beforehand.<sup>1</sup> And if it be argued that the *compilation* of such a set of precepts with a number of religious dicta (equally current in non-Christian Jewry) is evidence of a special ethical or religious gift in the compiler, the answer is that precisely the fact of such a compilation is the disproof of the assertion in the Gospels that the whole was delivered as a sermon on a mountain. A sermon it never was and never could be; and if the compiler was a man of unique character and qualification he was *not* the Gospel Jesus but the very type of which Mill denied the possibility!

That the Gospel ethic is non-original becomes more and more clear with every extension of relevant research. THE TESTAMENTS OF THE TWELVE

<sup>1</sup> See the collection of illustrations in Mr. Joseph McCabe's *Sources of the Morality of the Gospels* (R. P. A., 1914), and his excellent chapter on "The Parables of the Gospel and the Talmud."



PATRIARCHS, written between 109 and 106 B.C. by a Quietist Pharisee, is found to yield not only origins or anticipations for pseudo-historic data in the Gospels but patterns for its moral doctrine. Thus the notion that the Twelve Apostles are to rule over the tribes in the Messianic kingdom is merely an adaptation of the teaching in the TESTAMENTS that the twelve sons of Jacob are so to rule.<sup>1</sup> There too appears for the first time in Jewish literature the formula "on His right hand";<sup>2</sup> and a multitude of close textual parallels clearly testify to perusal of the book by the Gospel-framers and the epistle-makers. But above all is the Jewish book the original for the doctrines of forgiveness and brotherly love. Whereas the Old Testament leaves standing the ethic of revenge alongside of the prescription to forgive one's enemy, the TESTAMENTS give out what a highly competent Christian editor pronounces to be "the most remarkable statement on the subject of forgiveness in all ancient literature. They show a wonderful insight into the true psychology of the question. So perfect are the parallels in thought and diction between these verses [*Test. Gad*, vi, 3-7] and Luke xvii, 3; Matt. xviii, 15, 35, *that we must assume our Lord's acquaintance with them*. The meaning of forgiveness in both cases is the highest and noblest known to us—namely, the restoring the offender to communion with us, which he had forfeited through his offence.....We now see the importance of our text. It shows that pre-

<sup>1</sup> *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, ed. by R. H. Charles, 1908, pp. lxxx, 97, 122, 213, 214.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* pp. lxxxi, 213.



Christian Judaism possessed a noble system of ethics on the subject of forgiveness."<sup>1</sup>

Here the tribute goes to a Pharisee; in another connection it redounds to the other butt of Christian disparagement, the Scribes. As our editor points out, the collocation of the commands to love God *and* one's neighbour is even in Luke (x, 25-27) assigned not to Jesus but to a Scribe. But this too is found in the TESTAMENTS. "That the two great commandments were already conjoined in the teaching of the Scribes at the time of our Lord we may reasonably infer from our text,<sup>2</sup> which was written 140 years earlier, and from the account in Luke."<sup>3</sup> And here too, a century before the Christian era, we have a Jewish predication of the salvation of the Gentiles,<sup>4</sup> in the patronizing Jewish sense.

It is only for men partly hypnotized by sectarian creed that there can be anything surprising in these anticipations. The notion that Sacred Books contain the highest and rarest thought of their respective periods is a delusion that any critical examination of probabilities will destroy. Relatively high and rare thought does *not* find its way into Sacred Books; what these present is but the thought that is perceptible and acceptable to the majority, or a strong minority, of the better people; and it is never purified of grave imperfection, precisely because these never are. Perfect ethic is the possession of the perfect people, an extremely rare species. The

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* pp. xciii-xciv.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* Test. Iss. v, 2; Dan. v, 3; Iss. vii, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. xcv.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* p. 210 sq.

ethic of the TESTAMENTS, which is an obvious improvement on that of average Jewry, is in turn imperfect enough; even as that of the Gospels remains stamped with Jewish particularism, and is irretrievably blemished by the grotesquely iniquitous doctrine of damnation for non-belief.

Such asseverations as Mill's, constantly repeated as they are by educated men, are simply expressions of failure to comprehend the nature and the possibilities of life, of civilization, of history. The thesis is that in a world containing no one else capable of elevated thought, moral or religious, there suddenly appeared a marvellously inspired teacher, who chose a dozen disciples incapable of comprehending his doctrine, and during the space of one or many years—no one can settle whether one or two or three or four or ten or twenty—went about alternately working miracles and delivering moral and religious sayings (including a doctrine of eternal hell-fire for the unrepentant wicked, among whom were included all who refused to accept the new teaching); and that after the execution of the teacher on a charge of blasphemy or sedition the world found itself in possession of a supernormal moral and religious code, which constituted the greatest "moral reform" in the world's history. The very conception is a chimera. In a world in which no one could independently think the teacher's moral thoughts there could be no acceptance of them. If the code was pronounced good, it was so pronounced in terms of the moral nature and moral convictions of those who made the pronouncement. The very propa-

gandists of the creed after a few generations were found meeting gainsayers with the formula *anima naturaliter Christiana*.

Christianity made its way precisely because (1) it *was* a construction from current moral and religious material; and because (2) it adopted a system of economic organization already tested by Jews and Gentiles; and (3) because its doctrines were ascribed to a God, not to a man. Anything like a moral renovation of the world it never effected; that conception is a chimera of chimeras. While Mill, the amateur in matters of religious research, who "scarcely ever read a theological book,"<sup>1</sup> ascribed to Christian morality a unique and original quality, Newman, the essentially religious man, deliberately affirmed with the Rationalists that "There is little in the ethics of Christianity which the human mind may not reach by its natural powers, and which here or there.....has not in fact been anticipated."<sup>2</sup> And Baur, who gave his life and his whole powers to the problem which Mill assumed to dispose of by a dithyramb, put in a sentence the historic truth which Mill so completely failed to grasp:—

How soon would everything true and important that was taught by Christianity have been relegated to the order of the long-faded sayings of the noble humanitarians and thinking sages of antiquity, had not its teachings become words of eternal life in the mouth of its Founder!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bain, *J. S. Mill*, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to W. S. Lilly, cited in his *Claims of Christianity*, 1894, pp. 30-31.

<sup>3</sup> *Das Christenthum.....in die drei ersten Jahrhunderte*, 1853, pp. 35-36. (Eng. trans. i, 38.)

And a distinguished Scottish theologian and scholar has laid it down that

there is probably not a single moral precept in the Christian Scriptures which is not substantially also in the Chinese classics. There is certainly not an important principle in Bishop Butler's ethical teachings which had not been explicitly set forth by Mencius in the fourth century B.C. The Chinese thinker of that date had anticipated the entire moral theory of man's constitution expounded so long afterwards by the most famous of English moral philosophers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Flint in "St. Giles Lectures" on "The Faiths of the World," 1882, p. 419.

### CHAPTER III

## ILLUSIONS AS TO GOSPEL ETHIC

STRICTLY speaking, the whole problem of the moral value and the historical effects of Christianity lies outside the present issue; but we are forced to face it when the question of the *truth* of its historic basis is dismissed by a professed logician with a rhetorical thesis to the effect that "religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on" the personality of which he is challenged to prove the historicity. Mill answers the challenge by begging the question; and where he was capable of such a course multitudes, lay and clerical, will long continue to be so. For Mill the problem was something extraneous to his whole way of thought. Broadly speaking, he never handled a historical problem, properly so called. Other defenders of the historicity of Jesus, in turn, charge a want of historic sense upon all who venture to put the hypothesis that the Gospel Jesus is a mythical creation. The charge has been repeatedly made by men who can make no pretence of having ever independently elucidated any historical problem; and in one notable case, that of Dr. J. Estlin Carpenter, it is made by a scholar who has committed himself to the assertion of the historicity of Krishna. Such resorts to blank asseveration in such



matters are on all fours with the blank asseveration that the Gospel Jesus, in virtue of the teachings ascribed to him, is a figure too sublime for human invention.

The slightest reflection might obtrude the thought that it is precisely the invented figure that can most easily be made quasi-sublime. Is it pretended that Yahweh is *not* sublime? Is the Book of Job pretended to be historical? The Gospel Jesus is never shown to us save in a series of statuesque presentments, healing, preaching, prophesying, blessing, denouncing, suffering; he is expressly detached from domestic relationships; of his life apart from his Messianic career there is not a vestige of trace that is not nakedly mythical; of his mental processes there is not an attempt at explanation save in glosses often palpably incompetent; and of his plan or purpose, his hopes or expectations, no exegete has ever framed a non-theological theory that will stand an hour's examination. Those who claim as an evidence of uniqueness the fact that he is never accused by the evangelists of any wrong act do but prove their unpreparedness to debate any of the problems involved. A figure presented as divine, in a document that aims at establishing a cult, is *ipso facto* denuded of errancy so far as the judgment of the framers of the picture can carry them. But all that the framers and redactors of the Gospels could achieve was to outline a figure answering to *their* standards of perfection, free of what *they* regarded as sin or error. Going to work in an age and an environment in

which ascetic principles were commonly posited as against normal practice, they guard the God from every suggestion of carnal appetite; and the dialecticians of faith childishly ask us to contrast him with ancient Pagan deities whose legends are the unsifted survivals of savage folklore. As if *any* new Sacred Book in the same age would not have proceeded on the same standards; and as if the religious Jewish literature of the age of Christian beginnings were not as ascetic as the other. But inasmuch as the compilers of the Gospels could not transcend the moral standard of their time, they constantly obtrude its limitations and its blemishes. Had Mill attempted anything beyond his dithyramb, he would have been hard put to it to apply his ecstatic epithets to such teachings as these:—

Repent ye, *for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law [of Moses].

Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire. [Compare Matt. xxiii, 17: "Ye fools and blind"; and Luke xii, 20: "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."]

Whosoever shall marry her [the woman divorced without good cause] shall commit adultery.

Give to him that asketh thee.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth. Seek ye first [God's] kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things [that were to be disregarded] *shall be added unto you.*

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. [Compare the warning against saying, Thou fool.]

Go not into any way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the Samaritans.

Whosoever shall not receive you,.....as ye go

forth out of that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.

I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.

Think not that I come to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword..... He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you [Chorazin and Bethsaida; because of non-acceptance of the teacher]. .....It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.

Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

*Therefore* speak I to them in parables, *because* seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

In the end of the world the angels shall.....sever the wicked from the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire.

In vain do they worship me, *teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men.*

Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? [retort for the employer who pays the same for a day's work and for an hour's].

If ye have faith and doubt not.....even if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, it shall be done.

And his lord commended the unrighteous steward because he had done wisely.....And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; *that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles.*

I say unto you that unto everyone that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the

tormentors.....So also shall my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not everyone his brother from your hearts.

When such a mass of unmanageable doctrines is forced on the notice of the dithyrambists, there promptly begins a process of elimination—the method of Arnold, to which Mill would doubtless have subscribed, denying as he did that Jesus ever claimed to be the Son of God. Whatever is not sweetly reasonable in the Gospels, said Arnold, *cannot* be the word of Jesus; let us then pick and choose as we will. And justly enough may it be argued that we have been listening to different voices. It cannot be the same man who prohibited all anger, vetoing even the use of “Thou fool,” and then proceeded to vituperate Scribes and Pharisees in the mass as sons of hell; to curse a barren tree; and to call the erring “Ye fools and blind”—any more than it was the same man who said, “I am meek and lowly in heart,” and “A greater than Solomon is here,” or annulled precepts of the law after declaring that not a jot or tittle of it should pass away. But with what semblance of critical righteousness shall it be pretended that in a compilation thus palpably composite it was *the* teacher who said all the right things and others who said all the wrong, when as a matter of documentary fact the better sayings can all be paralleled in older or contemporary writings? That challenge is never so much as faced by the dithyrambists; to face it honestly would be the beginning of their end.

Some seem prepared to stake all on such a teach-



ing as the parable of the Good Samaritan, which actually teaches that a man of the religiously despised race could humanely succour one of the despising race when religious men of the same race passed him by. Is the parable then assimilated by those who stress it? Can they conceive that a Samaritan *could* so act? If yes, why cannot they conceive that a Samaritan, or another Jew than one, could put forth such a doctrine? Here is a story of actual human-kindness, paralleled in a hundred tales and romances of later times, a story which, appealing as it does to every reader, may reasonably be believed to have been *enacted* a thousand times by simple human beings who never heard of the Gospels. Yet we are asked to believe that only one Jewish or Gentile mind in the age of Virgil was capable of drawing the moral that the kindly and helpful soul is the true neighbour, and that the good man will be neighbourly to all; so rebuking the tribalism of the average Jew.

When, fifteen years ago, I wrote of "the moderate ethical height of the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is partly preceded in Old Testament teaching [Deut. xxiii, 7—an interpolation; cp. the Book of Ruth]," Dr. J. E. Carpenter indignantly replied: "The field of Greek literature is open; will Mr. Robertson take the Good Samaritan and from Plato to Plotinus find his match?" And the Rev. Thomas James Thorburn, D.D., LL.D., in his later work *JESUS THE CHRIST: HISTORICAL OR MYTHICAL?* (1912), wrote (p. 68):—

Dr. Estlin Carpenter has invited (we believe, in



vain!) Mr. Robertson to produce an equal to this same parable out of the whole range of Greek literature, which undoubtedly contains the choicest teaching of the ancient world.

Dr. Thorburn in his bibliography cited the first *and* second (1912) editions of PAGAN CHRISTS; he thoughtfully omitted, in launching his "we believe, in vain!", to ascertain whether there had been a second edition of CHRISTIANITY AND MYTHOLOGY, in which any reply I might have to make to Dr. Carpenter might naturally be expected to appear, that critic having challenged the proposition as put in the first edition. A second edition *had* appeared, in 1910, and there I had duly given the simple answer which the two learned Doctors of Divinity, so conscious of knowing all Greek literature from Plato to Plotinus, were unable to think of for themselves. The field of Greek literature, as Dr. Carpenter justly observes, is open; and it would have been fitting on his part to perambulate a little therein. The demanded instance lay to the hand of unlearned people in so familiar an author as Plutarch—in the tale of Lycurgus and Alcander. As Dr. Thorburn and Dr. Carpenter, however, must be supposed to have been ignorant of that story, it may be well to tell it briefly here.

Lycurgus having greatly exasperated the rich citizens by proposing the institution of frugal common meals, they made a tumult and stoned him in the market-place, so that he had to run for sanctuary in a temple. But one of his pursuers, a violent youth named Alcander, caught up with

him, and, striking him with a club as he turned round, dashed out one of his eyes. Lycurgus then stood calmly facing the citizens, letting them see his bleeding face, and his eye destroyed. All who saw him were filled with shame and remorse. They gave up Alcander to his mercy, and conducted Lycurgus in procession to his house to show their sympathy. He thanked them and dismissed them, but kept Alcander with him. He did him no harm, and used no reproachful words, but kept him as his servant, sending away all others. And Alcander, dwelling with Lycurgus, noting his serenity of temper and simplicity of life and his unwearying labours, became his warmest admirer, and ever after told his friends that Lycurgus was the best of men. In one version of the tale Lycurgus gave back his freedom to Alcander in presence of the citizens, saying, You gave me a bad citizen; I give you back a good one.

If our Doctors of Divinity are unable to see that this represents a rarer strain of goodness than the deed of the Good Samaritan, they must be told that they are lacking in that very moral judgment upon which they plume themselves. Forever sitting in the chair of judgment, defaming all who dissent from them, they are ethically less percipient than the cultured laity. Thousands of kindly human beings, I repeat, have succoured wounded strangers, even those of hostile races; and the tone held over the Gospel parable by some Christians is but the measure of their misconception of human nature. Their sectarian creed has bred in them a habit of

aspersing all humanity, all character, save the Christian, thus stultifying the very lesson of their parable, the framer of which would fain have taught men to transcend these very fanaticisms. They will not be "neighbours" to the pagan to the extent of crediting him with their own appreciation of magnanimity and human-kindness; they cannot even discuss his claim without seeking arrogantly to browbeat his favourers. Forever acclaiming the beauty of the command to forgive injuries, they cannot even debate without insolence where they know their sectarian claims are called in question. And I shall be agreeably disappointed if they proceed to handle the tale of Lycurgus and Alcander without seeking to demonstrate that somehow it falls below the level of the Gospels, where, as it happens, the endurance of violence and death by the God-man is in effect presented as God-like. But for that matter, even the oft-cited saying "Father, forgive them," occurs only in Luke of all the Gospels, and, being absent from two of the most ancient codices, betrays itself as a late addition to the text. It may be either Jewish or Gentile. For Plutarch, the Spartan tale is something edifying and gratifying, but he makes no parade of it as a marvel; and in his essay *OF PROFITING BY OUR ENEMIES* he speaks of the forgiveness of enemies as a thing not rarely to be met with:—

To forbear to be revenged of an enemy if opportunity and occasion is offered, and to let him go when he is in thy hands, is a point of great humanity and courtesy; but him that hath compassion of him when he is fallen into adversity, succoureth him in

distress, at his request is ready to show goodwill to his children, and an affection to sustain the state of his house and family being in affliction, who doth not love for this kindness, nor praise the goodness of his nature? (*Holland's translation.*)

Had that passage appeared in a Gospel, how would not our Doctors of Divinity have exclaimed over the moral superiority of Christian ethic, demonstrating that it alone appealed to the heart! In actual fact we find them denying that such passages exist. The most disgraceful instance known to me appears to implicate an Austrian theologian. In the "Editor's Forewords" to the Early English Text Society's volume of QUEEN ELIZABETH'S ENGLISHINGS there is a note on Plutarch's DE CURIOSITATE, à propos of Elizabeth's translation of that essay:—

In *De Curiositate*, as well as in his other writings, Plutarch proves himself to be a true Stoic philosopher, to possess first-rate moral principles and great fear of God.....His religious views sometimes remind us, like those of Seneca, of Christian teaching; but here there is always one important omission—viz., the commendation of charity or brotherly love; *of this Christian virtue the stoic, so virtuous in his own relations, knows absolutely nothing.*

At the close of the "Forewords" the Editor, Miss Caroline Pemberton, mentions that "The comments on the writings of Boethius and Plutarch are by Dr. J. Schenk, of Meran, Tyrol." To Dr. Schenk, then, must apparently be credited the high-water mark in Christian false-witness against paganism. Either he did or he did not know that Plutarch in other writings had given full expression to the ethic of brotherly love. If he did not know,



he was not only framing a wanton libel in sheer ignorance but giving a particularly deadly proof of his own destitution of the very virtue he was so unctuously denying to the pagan. A man devoid not merely of charity but of decent concern for simple justice poses as a moral teacher in virtue of his Christianity; even as the professional encomiasts of the parable of the Good Samaritan demonstrate their own blindness to its meaning, playing the Levite to the Pagan.

Plutarch, so much better a man than his Christian critic, was in turn no innovator in ethics. As every student knows, such doctrines as those above cited from him are far older than the Christian religion. Five centuries before the Christian era Confucius put the law of reciprocity in the sane form of the precept that we should not do unto others what we would not that they should do unto us. Are we to suppose that the rule had been left to Confucius to invent? Christians who cannot conform to it are not ashamed to disparage the precept of Confucius as a "negative" teaching, implying that there is a higher moral strain in their formula which prescribes the doing to others what we would wish them to do to us. There, if any difference of code be really intended, we are urged to confer benefits in order to have them returned. If no difference is intended, the disparagement is mere deceit. In the ancient Hindu epic, the *Mahábhárata*, it is declared that "The Gods regard with delight the man who.....when struck does not strike again," and that "The good, when they



promote the welfare of others, *expect no reciprocity*." How long are we to listen to the childish claim that moral maxims which in India were delivered millenniums ago by forgotten men were framable in Seneca's day only in Syria, and there only by one "unique and effulgent" personality, whose mere teaching lifted humanity to new heights? Had no nameless man or woman in Greece ever urged the beauty of non-retaliation before Plato?

If clerics cannot rise above the old disingenuous sectarian spirit, it is time at least that laymen should. The more historic comprehension a man has of the ancient world, of Plutarch's world, with all its sins and delusions, the less can he harbour the notion of the moral miracle involved in the thesis of the unique teacher, suddenly revealing to an amazed humanity heights of moral aspiration before undreamt of. And any considerate scrutiny of the *logia* of the Gospels will inevitably force the open-minded student to recognize multiplicity of thought and ideal, and compel him to seek some explanation. An effort to detach a possible personality by the elimination of impossible adjuncts is the next natural step.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE METHOD OF BLUSTER

FOR anyone who will soberly and faithfully face the facts there must sooner or later arise the problem, Is there *any* unifying personality behind this medley of many sets of doctrines, many voices, many schools? Even if it were possible to piece together from it a coherent body of either ethical or religious thought, and jettison the rest, is there any reason to believe that the selected matter belongs to the Gospel Teacher with the Twelve Disciples, crucified on the morning after the Pass-over under Pontius Pilate? When the crowning doctrine of sacrament and sacrifice is seen to be but the consummation of a religious lore beginning in prehistoric and systematic human sacrifice, and traceable in a score of ancient cults, is it possible to claim that the palpably dramatic record of Last Supper, Agony, Betrayal, Trial, and Crucifixion is a historic record of a strange coincidence between cult practice and biography? And if that goes, what is left? If, says Loisy, the condemnation of Jesus as pretended Messiah by Pilate "could be put in doubt, one would have no motive for affirming the existence of Christ."<sup>1</sup> And it can!

<sup>1</sup> *Jésus et la tradition évangélique*, 1910, p. 45.

Some, assuming to settle the problem by rhetoric, in effect stand for a "personality" without any pretence of establishing what the "personality" taught. And this inexpensive device will doubtless long continue to be practised by the large class who insist upon solving all such problems by instinct. An example of that procedure is afforded by an article headed "A Barren Controversy," by the Rev. Frederick Sinclair, in a magazine entitled FELLOWSHIP, the organ of the Free Religious Fellowship, Melbourne, issue of March, 1915. The controversy is certainly barren enough as Mr. Sinclair conducts it. His religious temper is of a familiar type. "It is a hard task to prove the obvious," he begins; "and no obligation is laid on us to examine and refute the evidences alleged in support of this or that cock-and-bull theory." We can imagine how the reverend critic would have shone in the sixteenth or the seventeenth century, disposing of the Copernican theory, which so presumptuously assailed "the obvious." True to his principles, he does not hamper himself by meeting arguments or evidence. "Mythical theories about Christ have about as much scientific value and importance as the theories of the Baconians about Shakespeare. They.....are products.....of that perverted credulity which will swallow anything, so long as it is not orthodox; and they are best met by the method of satire adopted by Whately in his 'Historic Doubts' on Napoleon." And yet our expert renounces that admirable instrument in favour of the simpler procedure vulgarly known as

"bluff." He is in reality a good example of the psychosis of the very Baconism which he contemns, and which he would probably be quite unable to confute. An æsthetic impression of "reality" derived from a hypnotized perusal of Mark, and a feeling that only one man could deliver such oracles, are the beginning and end of his dialectic and scholarly stock-in-trade; even as a consciousness that Bacon *must* be the author of the Plays, and that the actor Shakespeare *could not* have written them, is the beginning and end of the ignorant polemic of the Baconists.

To do him justice, it should be noted that Mr. Sinclair warns his readers both before and after his case that his handling of the theme and their preparation for estimating it leave a great deal to be desired by those who care to see applied "the method of careful criticism." Still, he is satisfied that it is "adequate to the particular question we have been considering." And this is how Mr. Sinclair has considered:—

Anyone who will pay this controversy the compliment of a few hours' consideration is advised to bring his own judgment to bear on it in the following way: Let him begin by taking a copy of St. Mark's Gospel, which is the earliest of the four, in either of the English versions, and read it through, pencil in hand, striking out all the miraculous or quasi-miraculous stories. Then, gathering up what remains, let him read it, first as a whole, then singly, episode by episode, always keeping the eye of the imagination open, dismissing as far as possible any prepossessions, and letting the author make his own impression, without the interfering



offices of critic or commentator. Having done this, let the reader ask of himself of each story: Is this a story which *seems* to belong to actual life, to be told of a real human being, with distinct individuality, or is it rather a *literary invention*, designed to *add* something to a *conventional* figure? Does the narrative move with the freedom and variety of life, or does it fit into a *conventional, symmetrical design*? Does the writer's style and method arouse the suspicion of *literary artifice*? Must one say of this or that story that its reality is the reality of life, or of an art which *cunningly counterfeits life*?

The open-minded reader, I trust, will hardly need to be told that what is here done is to set a false problem and ignore the real issue. Mr. Sinclair either cannot understand that issue or elects to evade it. Probably the former is the explanation. No critic of the Gospels, so far as I remember, ever suggested that any of them "cunningly counterfeits life"; and certainly no one ever pretended that Mark<sup>1</sup> exhibits a "conventional, symmetrical design," though Wilke argued that it "freely moulded the traditional historical material in pursuance of literary aims," and B. Weiss praises its literary colouring. It is a heap of unreal incident, fortuitously collocated,<sup>2</sup> and showing nothing approaching to symmetrical design. "Conventional" raises another question; in this as in all the Gospels there is plenty of convention.

<sup>1</sup> It should be explained that in using, for convenience sake, the traditional ascriptions of the four Gospels, I do not for a moment admit that these hold good of the Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John of the tradition. In not one case is that tradition historically valid.

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. A. Wright (*N. T. Problems*, 1898, p. 15) pronounces it "completely unchronological." Sanday acquiesces (*id.*, p. 177).



Let us but follow for a little the simple method of selection prescribed by Mr. Sinclair, and see what we get. What we are to make of Mark i, 1-9, is far from clear. It sets forth the advent of John as the fulfilment of a prophecy—*i.e.*, a miracle; and it describes his mission in the baldest conceivable summary, save for the sentence: "And John was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leathern girdle about his loins, and did eat locusts and wild honey." Is this "convention" or "reality"? I am not inclined to call it "literary artifice," unless we are to apply that description to the beginning of the average nursery tale, as perhaps we should. What must strike the inquiring reader is that if we were to have a touch of "reality" about the Baptist we should be told something about his inner history, his antecedents, and what he preached. What we *are* told is that "he preached, saying, There cometh after me he that is mightier than I.....I baptized you with water; but he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

If this part of the narrative has not been "struck out" by Mr. Sinclair's neophytes as plainly belonging to the miraculous, the next five verses presumably must be. The non-miraculous narrative begins at v. 14:—

Now, *after that John was delivered up*, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and *believe in the Gospel* [not a word of which has been communicated].

And passing along by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a

net in the sea; for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they left the nets, and followed him. And going on a little further, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending the nets. And straightway he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after him.

This "episode," for Mr. Sinclair, "seems to belong to real life, to be told of a real human being with distinct individuality." For critical readers it is a primitive "conventional" narrative, told by a writer who has absolutely no historic knowledge to communicate. Of the preaching of the Saviour he has no more to tell than of the preaching of the Baptist. Both are as purely "conventional," so far, as an archaic statue of Hermes. Of "the freedom and variety of life" there is not a trace; Mr. Sinclair, who professes to find these qualities, is talking in the manner of a showman at a fair. The important process of making disciples resolves itself into a fairy tale: "Come and I will make you fishers of men; and they came." A measure of "literary artifice" is perhaps to be assigned to the items of "casting a net," "mending the net," and "left their father in the boat with the hired servants";<sup>1</sup> but it is the literary art of a thousand fairy tales, savage and civilized, and stands for the method of a narrator who is dealing with purely

<sup>1</sup> Such details, imposed on an otherwise empty narrative, suggest a pictorial basis, as does the account of the Baptist. Strauss cites the Hebrew myth-precedent of the calling of Elisha from the plough by Elijah.

conventional figures, not with characters concerning which he has knowledge. The calling of the first disciples in the rejected Fourth Gospel has much more semblance of reality.

If the cautious reader is slow to see these plain facts on the pointing of one who is avowedly an unbeliever in the historic tradition, let him listen to a scholar of the highest eminence, who, after proving himself a master in Old Testament criticism, set himself to specialize on the New. Says Wellhausen: "The Gospel of Mark, in its entirety, lacks the character of history."<sup>1</sup> And he makes good his judgment in detail:—

Names of persons are rare: even Jairus is not named in [codex] D. Among the *dramatis personæ* it is only Jesus who distinctively speaks and acts; the antagonists provoke him; the disciples are only figures in the background. But of what he lived by, how he dwelt, ate, and drank, bore himself with his companions, nothing is vouchsafed. It is told that he taught in the synagogue on the Sabbath, but no notion is given of the how; we get only something of what he said outside the synagogue, usually through a special incident which elicits it. The normal things are never related, only the extraordinary.....The scantiness of the tradition is remarkable.<sup>2</sup>

The local connection of the events, the itinerary, leaves as much to be desired as the chronological; seldom is the transit indicated in the change of scene. Single incidents are often set forth in a lively way, and this without any unreal or merely rhetorical devices, but they are only anecdotally related, *rari nantes in gurgite vasto*. They do not

<sup>1</sup> *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien*, 1905, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 47.

amount to material for a life of Jesus. And one never gets the impression that an attempt had been made among those who had eaten and drunk with him to give others a notion of his personality.<sup>1</sup>

Wellhausen, it is true, finds suggestions of a real and commanding personality; but they are very scanty, the only concrete detail being the watching the people as they drop their offerings into the collecting-chest! "Passionate moral sensibility distinguishes him. He gives way to divine feeling in anger against the oppressors of the people and in sympathy with the lowly." But here too there is qualification:—

But in Mark this motive for miracles seldom comes out. They are meant to be mainly displays of the Messiah's power. Mark does not write *de vita et moribus Jesu*: he has not the aim of making his person distinguishable, or even intelligible. It is lost for him in the divine vocation; he means to show that Jesus is the Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Then we have a significant balancing between the perception that Mark is not history, and that, after all, it is practically all there is:—

Already the oral tradition which he found had been condensed under the influence of the standpoint from which he set out. He is silent on this and that *which he can omit as being known to his readers—for instance, the names of the parents of Jesus (!)*. Nevertheless, he has left little that is properly historical for his successors to glean after him; and what they know in addition is of doubtful worth.....

Why is not something more, and something more

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 52.



trustworthy, reported of the intercourse of the Master with his disciples? It would rather seem that the narrative tradition in Mark did not come directly from the intimates of Jesus. It has on the whole a somewhat rude and demotic cast, as if it had previously by a long circulation in the mouth of the people come to the rough and drastic style in which it lies before us.....Mark took up what the tradition carried to him.

Such is the outcome of a close examination by an original scholar who takes for granted the historicity of Jesus. It is a poor support to a pretence of finding a lifelike narrative.

If the reader under Mr. Sinclair's tutelage will at this point vary his study somewhat (at the cost of a few extra hours) by reading samples of quite primitive folk-lore—say the *HOTTENTOT FABLES AND TALES* collected by Dr. Bleek, in which the characters are mostly, but not always, animals; or some of the fairy tales in Gill's *MYTHS AND SONGS OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC*—and then proceed to the tale of *TOM TIT TOT*, as given by Mr. Edward Clodd in the dialect of East Anglia, he will perhaps begin to realize that unsophisticated narrators not only can but frequently do give certain touches of quasi-reality to "episodes" which no civilized reader can suppose to have been real. In particular he will find in the vivacious *TOM TIT TOT* an amount of "the freedom and variety of life" in comparison with which the archaic stiffness and bareness of the Gospel narrative is as dumb-show beside drama. And if he will next pay some attention to the narrative of Homer, in which Zeus and Hêrê are so



much more life-like than a multitude of the human personages of the epic, and then turn to see how Plutarch writes professed biography, some of it absolutely mythical, but all of it on a documentary basis of some kind, he will perhaps begin to suspect that Mr. Sinclair has not even perceived the nature of the problem on which he pronounces, and so is not in a position to "consider" it at all. Plutarch is nearly as circumstantial about Theseus and Herakles and Romulus as about Solon. But when he has real biographical material to go upon as to real personages he gives us a "freedom and variety of life" which is as far as the poles asunder from the hieratic figures of the Christian Gospel. Take his Fabius Maximus. After the pedigree, with its due touch of myth, we read :—

His own personal nickname was Verrucosus, because he had a little wart growing on his upper lip. The name of Ovicula, signifying sheep, was also given him while yet a child, because of his slow and gentle disposition. He was quiet and silent, very cautious in taking part in children's games, and learned his lessons slowly and with difficulty, which, combined with his easy obliging ways with his comrades, made those who did not know him think that he was dull and stupid. Few there were who could discern, hidden in the depths of his soul, his glorious and lion-like character.

This is biography, accurate or otherwise. Take again the LIFE OF PERICLES, where after the brief account of parentage, with the item of the mother's dream, we get this :—

His body was symmetrical, but his head was long out of all proportion; for which reason in

nearly all his statues he is represented wearing a helmet; as the sculptors did not wish, I suppose, to reproach him with this blemish.....Most writers tell us that his tutor in music was Damon, whose name they say should be pronounced with the first syllable short. Aristotle, however, says that he studied under Pythocleides. This Damon, it seems, was a sophist of the highest order.....

The "biographer" who so satisfies Mr. Sinclair's sense of actuality has not one word of this kind to say of the youth, upbringing, birthplace, or appearance of the Teacher, who for him was either God or Supreme Man. Seeking for the alleged "freedom and variety of life" in the narrative, we go on to read:—

And they go into Capernaum; *and straightway on the sabbath day* he entered into the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at his teaching: for he taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes. *And straightway* there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit—

and straightway we are back in the miraculous. Mr. Joseph McCabe, who in his excellent book on the SOURCES OF THE MORALITY OF THE GOSPELS avows that he holds by the belief in a historical Jesus, though unable to assign to him with confidence any one utterance in the record, fatally anticipates Mr. Sinclair by remarking that "If the inquirer will try the simple and interesting experiment of eliminating from the Gospel of Mark all the episodes which essentially involve miracle, he will find the remainder of the narrative amazingly paltry." To which verdict does the independent reader begin to incline? Thus the "episodes"

continue, after three paragraphs of the miraculous :—

And in the morning, *a great while before day*, he rose up and went out, and departed into a desert place, and there prayed. And Simon and they that were with him followed after him; and they found him, and say unto him, All are seeking thee. And he saith unto them, Let us go elsewhere into the next towns, that I may preach there also; for to this end came I forth. And he went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out devils.

It would seem sufficient to say that Mr. Sinclair, with his "freedom and variety of life," is incapable of critical reflection upon what he reads. In the opening chapter we have not a single touch of actuality; the three meaningless and valueless touches of detail ("*a great while before day*" is the third) serve only to reveal the absolute deficit of biographical knowledge. We have reiterated statements that there was teaching, and not a syllable of what was taught. The only utterances recorded in the chapter are parts of the miracle-episodes, which we are supposed to ignore. Let us then consider the critic's further asseveration :—

It will be observed that certain *distinct* traits appear in the central figure, and that these traits are not merely those of the conventional religious hero, but the more simple human touches of anger, pity, indignation, despondency, exultation; these scattered touches, *each so vivid*, fuse into a natural and intelligible whole. The Jesus of Mark is a real man, who moves and speaks and feels like a man (!) — "a creature not too bright or good for human nature's daily food"—

a notable variation from the more familiar thesis of the "sublime" and "unique" figure of current polemic. Looking for the alleged details, we find Jesus calling the fifth disciple: "He saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him"—another touch of "freedom and variety." Then, after a series of Messianic utterances, including a pronouncement against Sabbatarianism of the extremer sort, comes the story of the healing of the withered hand, with its indignant allocution to "them" in the synagogue: "Is it lawful on the sabbath day to do good, or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?" Here, in a miracle story, we have an intelligible protest against Sabbatarianism: is it the protest or the indignation that vouches for the actuality of the protesting figure? Nay, if we are to elide the miraculous, how are we to let the allocution stand?

These protests against Sabbatarianism, as it happens, are the first approximations to actuality in the document; and as such they raise questions of which the "instinctive" school appear to have no glimpse, but which we shall later have to consider closely. In the present connection, it may suffice to ask the question: Was anti-Sabbatarianism, or was it not, the first concrete issue raised by the alleged Teacher? In the case put, is it likely to have been? Were the miraculous healing of disease, and the necessity of feeding the disciples, with the corollary that the Son of Man was Lord of the Sabbath, salient features in a popular gospel of repentance in view of the coming of the Kingdom



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of God? If so, it is in flat negation of the insistence on the maintenance of the law in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. v, 17-20), which thus becomes for us a later imposition on the cultus of a purely Judaic principle, in antagonism to the other. That is to say, a movement which *began* with anti-Sabbatarianism was after a time joined or directed by Sabbatarian Judaists, for whom the complete apparatus of the law was vital. If, on the other hand, recognizing that anti-Sabbatarianism, in the terms of the case, was not likely to be a primary element in the new teaching, that its first obtrusion in the alleged earliest Gospel is in an expressly Messianic deliverance, and its second in a miracle-story, we proceed to "strike out" both items upon Mr. Sinclair's ostensible principles, we are deprived of the first touch of "indignation" and "anger" which would otherwise serve to support his very simple thesis.



## CHAPTER V

### SCHMIEDEL AND DEROGATORY MYTH

FROM this point onwards, every step in the investigation will be found to convict the Unitarian thesis of absolute nullity. It is indeed, on the face of it, an ignorant pronouncement. The characteristics of "anger, pity, indignation, despondency, exultation," are all present in the myth of Herakles, of whom Diodorus Siculus, expressly distinguishing between mythology and history, declares (i, 2) that "by the confession of all, during his whole life he freely undertook great and continual labours and dangers, in order that by doing good to the race of men he might win immortal fame." Herakles was, in fact, a Saviour who "went about doing good."<sup>1</sup> The historicity of Herakles is not on that score accepted by instructed men; though I have known divinity students no less contemptuous over the description of the cognate Samson saga as a sun myth than is Mr. Sinclair over the denial of the historicity of Jesus.

So common a feature of a hundred myths, indeed, is the set of characteristics founded on, that we may at once come to the basis of his argument, a blundering reiteration of the famous thesis of

<sup>1</sup> Note the identity of terms, *εὐεργετῶν* in Acts (x, 38), *εὐεργετήσας* in Diodorus.

Professor Schmiedel, who is the sole source of Mr. Sinclair's latent erudition. "The line of inquiry here suggested," he explains, "has been worked out in a pamphlet of Schmiedel, which will be found in the Fellowship library." But the dialectic which broadly avails for the Bible class will not serve their instructor here. The essence of the argument which Professor Schmiedel urges with scholarlike sobriety is thus put by Mr. Sinclair with the extravagance natural to his species:—

*Many* [compare Schmiedel!] of the stories represent him [Jesus] in a light which, from the point of view of conventional hero-worship, is even derogatory; his friends come to seize him as a madman; he is estranged from his own mother; he can do no mighty work in the unsympathetic atmosphere of his own native place.

The traditionalist is here unconsciously substituting a new and different argument for the first. Hitherto the thesis has been that of the "vividness" of the record, the "human touches," the "speaking and feeling like a real man," the "freedom and variety of life." Apparently he has had a shadow of misgiving over these simple criteria. If, indeed, he had given an hour to the perusal of Albert Kalthoff's *RISE OF CHRISTIANITY*, instead of proceeding to vilipend a literature of which he had read nothing, he would have learned that his preliminary thesis is there anticipated and demolished. Kalthoff meets it by the simple observation that the books of *RUTH* and *JONAH* supply "human touches" and "freedom and variety of life" to a far greater degree than does the Gospel

story considered as a life of Jesus; though practically all scholars are now agreed that both of the former books are deliberately planned fictions, or early "novels with a purpose." RUTH is skilfully framed to contend against the Jewish bigotry of race; and JONAH to substitute a humane ideal for the ferocious one embalmed in so much of the sacred literature. Yet so "vividly" are the central personages portrayed that down till the other day all the generations of Christendom, educated and uneducated alike, accepted them unquestioningly as real records, whatever might be thought by the judicious few of the miracle element in JONAH.

It is thus ostensibly quite expedient to substitute for the simple thesis of "vividness" in regard to the second Gospel the quite different argument that some of the details exclude the notion that "the author" regarded Jesus as a supernatural person. But this thesis instantly involves the defence in fresh trouble, besides breaking down utterly on its own merits. In the early chapters of Mark, Jesus is emphatically presented as a supernormal person—the deity's "beloved Son," "the Holy One of God," who has the divine power of forgiving sins, is "lord even of the sabbath," and is hailed by the defeated spirits of evil as "the Son of God," and the "Son of the Most High God." Either the conception of Jesus in Mark vi is compatible with all this or it is not. If *not*, the case collapses, for the "derogatory" episode must be at once branded as an interpolation. And if it be argued that even as an interpolation it

testifies at once to a non-supernaturalist view of the Founder's function and a real knowledge of his life and actions, we have only to give a list of more or less mythical names in rebuttal. To claim that the episode in Mark vi, 1-6, is "derogatory from the point of view of *conventional* hero-worship," and therefore presumptively historical, is to ignore alike Jewish and Gentile hero-worship. In the Old Testament Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Judah, Moses, Aaron, Samson, David, and Solomon are all successively placed in "derogatory" positions; and the Pagan hero-worshippers of antiquity are equally with the Jewish recalcitrant to Mr. Sinclair's conviction of what they ought to do.

Professor Schmiedel is aware, though Mr. Sinclair apparently is not, that Herakles in the myth is repeatedly placed in "derogatory" positions, and is not only seized as a madman but actually driven mad. The reader who will further extend Mr. Sinclair's brief curriculum to a perusal of the *BACCHÆ* of Euripides will find that the God, who in another story is temporarily driven mad by Juno, is there subjected to even greater indignities than those so triumphantly specified by our hierologist. Herakles and Dionysos, we may be told, were only demigods, not Gods. But Professor Schmiedel's thesis is that for the writer of Mark or of his original document Jesus was only a holy man. On the other hand—to say nothing of the myths of Zeus and Hêrê, Arês and Aphroditê, Hephaistos and Poseidon—Apollo, certainly a God for the framers of *his* myth, is there actually represented



as being banished from heaven and living in a state of servitude to Admetus for nine years. A God, then, could be conceived in civilized antiquity as undergoing many and serious indignities. These simple *à priori* arguments are apt to miscarry even in the hands of careful and scrupulous scholars like Professor Schmiedel, who have failed to realize that no amount of textual scholarship can suffice to settle problems which in their very nature involve fundamental issues of anthropology, mythology, and hierology. As Professor Schmiedel is never guilty of browbeating, I make no disparagement of his solid work on the score that he has not taken account of these fields in his argument; but when his untenable thesis is brandished by men who have neither his form of scholarship nor any other, it is apt to incur summary handling.

Elsewhere I have examined Professor Schmiedel's thesis in detail.<sup>1</sup> Here it may suffice to point out (1) as aforesaid, that the argument from derogatory treatment is not in the least a proof that in an ancient narrative a personage is not regarded as superhuman; (2) that a *suffering* Messiah was expressly formulated in Jewish literature in the pre-Christian period;<sup>2</sup> and (3) that there are extremely strong grounds for inferring purposive invention—of that naïf kind which marks the whole mass of early hierology—in the very episodes upon which

<sup>1</sup> *Christianity and Mythology*, 2nd ed. p. 441 sq.; *Pagan Christs*, 2nd ed. pp. 229–236. A notably effective criticism is passed on the thesis in Prof. W. B. Smith's *Ecce Deus*, p. 177 sq. Mr. Sinclair, of course, does not dream of meeting such replies.

<sup>2</sup> What else is signified by Acts iii, 18; xvii, 3?



he founds. The first concrete details of the Founder's propaganda in Mark, as we have seen, exhibit him as clashing with the Judaic environment. In later episodes he clashes with it yet further. The "derogatory" episodes exhibit him as clashing with his personal environment, his family and kin, concerning whom there has been no mention whatever at the outset, where we should expect to find it. All this is in line with the anti-Judaic element of the Gospel. If at early stages in the larger Jesuine movement there were reasons why the Founder should be represented as detaching himself from the Mosaic law; as being misunderstood and deserted by his disciples; and as disparaging even the listening Jewish multitude (concerning whom Mark, iv, 10 sq., makes him say that "unto them that are without, all things are done in parables, that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand, *lest haply they should turn again, and it should be forgiven them*"), is there anything unlikely in his being inventively represented as meeting antipathetic treatment from his family?<sup>1</sup> At a time when so-called "brothers of the Lord" ostensibly claimed authority in the Judæo-Gentile community, an invented tale of original domestic hostility to the Teacher would be as likely as the presence of authorities so styled is unlikely on the assumption that the story in Mark was all along current. The very fact that allusions to the family of the Lord suddenly appear in a

<sup>1</sup> Dr. W. B. Smith sees in the story a mere symbolizing of the rejection of Jesus by the Jews. This may very well be the case.

record which had introduced him as a heavenly messenger, without mention of home or kindred or preparation, tells wholly against the originality of the later details, which in the case of the naming of "the carpenter" and his mother have a polemic purpose.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Flinders Petrie even infers a "late" reference to the Virgin-Birth. *The Growth of the Gospels*, 1910, p. 86. This Loisy rejects.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE VISIONARY EVANGEL

ALL this applies, of course, to the "Primitive Gospel" held to underlie all of the synoptics, Mark included—a datum which reduces to comparative unimportance the question of priority among these. As collected by the school of Bernhard Weiss,<sup>1</sup> the primitive Gospel, like Mark, set out with a non-historical introduction of the Messiah to be baptized by John. It then gives the temptation myth in full; and immediately afterwards the Teacher is made to address to disciples (who have not previously been mentioned or in any way accounted for) the Sermon on the Mount, with variations, and without any mount. In this place we have the uncompromising insistence on the Mosaic law; and soon, after some miracles of healing and some Messianic discourses, including the liturgical "Come unto me all ye that labour," we have the Sabbatarian question raised on the miracle of the healing of the man with the dropsy, but without the argument from the Davidic eating of the shewbread.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the useful work of Mr. A. J. Jolley, *The Synoptic Problem for English Readers*, 1893.

<sup>2</sup> Yet B. Weiss had contended (*Manual*, Eng. tr. ii, 224) that Mark ii, 24 ff., 28, "must be taken from a larger collection of sayings in which the utterances of Jesus respecting the keeping of the Sabbath were put together (Matt. xii, 2-8)."

There is no more of the colour of history here than in Mark: so obviously is it wanting in both that the really considerate exegetes are driven to explain that history was not the object in either writing. In both "the twelve" are suddenly sent—in the case of Mark, after a list of twelve had been inserted without any reference to the first specified five; in the reconstructed "primitive" document without any list whatever—to preach the blank gospel, "The kingdom of God is at hand," with menaces for the non-recipient, the allocutions to Chorazin and Bethsaida being here made part of the instructions to the apostles.

What, then, are the disciples supposed to have preached? What had the Teacher preached as an evangel of "the Kingdom"? The record has expressly represented that his parables were incomprehensible to his own disciples; and when they ask for an explanation they are told that the parables are expressly meant to be unintelligible, but that to *them* an explanation is vouchsafed. It is to the effect that "the seed is the word." What word? The "Kingdom"? The mystic allegories on that head are avowedly not for the multitude: they could not have been. Yet those allegories are the sole explanations ever afforded in the Gospels of the formula of "the Kingdom" which was to be the purport of the evangel of the apostles to the multitude. They themselves had failed to understand the parables; and they were forbidden to convey the explanation. What, then, had they to convey?

And that issue raises another. Why were there disciples at all? Disciples are understood to be prepared as participants in or propagandists of somebody's teaching—a lore either exoteric or esoteric. But no intelligible view has ever been given of the purpose of the Gospel Jesus in creating his group of Twelve. If we ask what he taught them, the only answer given by the documents is: (1) Casting out devils; (2) The meaning of parables which were meant to be unintelligible to the people: that is, either sheer thaumaturgy or a teaching which was never to be passed on. On the economic life of the group not one gleam of light is cast. Judas carried a "bag," but as to whence came its contents there is no hint. The whole concept hangs in the air, a baseless dream. The myth-makers have not even tried to make it plausible.

The problems thus raised are not only not faced by the orthodox exegetes; they are not *seen* by them. They take the most laudable pains to ascertain what the primitive Gospel was like, and, having settled it to the satisfaction of a certain number, they rest from their labours. Yet we are only at the beginning of the main, the historic problem, from which Baur recalled Strauss to the documentary, with the virtual promise that its solution would clear up the other.

A "higher" criticism than that so-called, it is clear, must set about the task; and its first conclusion, I suggest, must be that there never was any Christian evangel by the Christ and the Twelve. These allegories of the Kingdom are



framed to conceal the fact that the gospel-makers had no evangel to describe; though it may be claimed as a proof of their forensic simplicity that they actually represent the Founder as vetoing all popular explanation of the very formula which they say he sent his disciples to preach to the populace. An idea of the Kingdom of God, it may be argued, was already current among the Jews: the documents assert that that was the theme of the Baptist. Precisely, but was the evangel of Jesus then simply the evangel of John, which it was to supersede? And was the evangel of John only the old evangel, preached by Pharisees and others from the time of the Maccabees onwards?<sup>1</sup> Whatever it was, what is the meaning of the repeated Gospel declaration that the nature of the Kingdom must *not* be explained to the people? There is only one inference. The story of the sending forth of the twelve is as plainly mythical as is Luke's story of the sending forth of the seventy, which even the orthodox exegetes abandon as a "symmetrical" myth; though they retain the allocution embodied in it. What is in theory the supreme episode in the early propaganda of the cult is found to have neither historical content nor moral significance. Not only is there not a word of explanation of the formula of the evangel, there is not a word of description of the apostles' experience, but simply the usual negation of knowledge:—

And the disciples returned and told him *all that they had done*, saying, Lord, *even the devils are*

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Dr. R. H. Charles, *The Book of Jubilees*, 1902, p. xiv.

*subject unto us through thy name.* And he said, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven; behold I have given you power to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy; notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven.....(Luke x, 17-20, with "the disciples" for "the seventy").

And this is history, or what the early Christian leaders thought fit to put in place of history, for Christian edification. The disciples, be it observed, had exorcized *in the name of Jesus* where Jesus had never been, a detail accepted by the faithful unsuspectingly, and temporized over no less unsuspectingly by the "liberal" school, but serving for the critical student to raise the question: *Was there, then, an older cult of a Jesus-God in Palestine?* Leaving that problem for the present, we can but note that the report in effect tells that there was no evangel to preach. To any reflecting mind, it is the utterance of men who had nothing to relate, but are inserting an empty framework, wholly mythical, in a void past. Themselves ruled by the crudest superstition, they do but make the Divine Teacher talk on their own level, babbling of Satan falling from heaven, and of treading on serpents. All the labours of the generations of laborious scholars who have striven to get to the foundations of their documents have resulted in a pastiche which only the more clearly reveals the total absence of a historic basis such as the Gospels more circumstantially suggest. In the end we have neither history nor biography, but an absolutely

enigmatic evangel, set in a miscellany of miracles and of discourses which are but devices to disguise the fact that there had been no original evangel to preach. If the early church had any creed, it was not this. It originated in a *rite*, not in an evangel.

One hypothesis might, indeed, be hazarded to save the possibility of an actual evangel by the Founder. If, taking him to be historical, we assume him to have preached a political doctrine subversive of the Roman rule, and to have thereby met his death, we could understand that, in a later period in which the writers connected with the movement were much concerned to conciliate the Romans, it might have been felt expedient, and indeed imperative, to suppress the facts. They would not specify the evangel, because they dared not. On this view the Founder was a Messiah of the ordinary Jewish type, aiming at the restoration of the Jewish State. But such a Jesus would not be the "Jesus of the Gospels" at all. He would merely be a personage of the same (common) name, who in no way answered to the Gospel figure, but had been wholly denaturalized to make him a cult-centre. On this hypothesis there has been no escape from the "myth-theory," but merely a restatement of it. A Jesus put to death by the Romans as a rebel Mahdi refuses to compose with the Teacher who sends out his apostles to preach his evangel; who proclaims, if anything, a purely spiritual kingdom; and who is put to death as seeking to subvert the Jewish faith, the Roman governor giving only a passive and reluctant assent.

On the political hypothesis, as on the myth-theory here put, the whole Gospel narrative of the Tragedy which establishes the cult remains mythical. We have but to proceed, then, with the analysis which reveals the manner of its composition and of its inclusion in the record.

It is admitted by the reconstructors that the primitive Gospel had no conclusion, telling nothing of Last Supper, Agony, Betrayal, Crucifixion, or Resurrection. It did not even name Judas as the betrayer. And they explain that it was because of lacking these details that it passed out of use, superseded by the Gospels which gave them. As if the conclusion, were it compiled in the same fashion, could not have been added to the original document, which *ex hypothesi* had the prestige of priority. Why the composer of the original did not add the required chapters is a question to which we get only the most futile answers, as is natural when the exegetes have not critically scrutinized the later matter. Thus even Mr. Jolley is content to say:—

The omission of any account of the Passion or Resurrection is natural enough in a writing primarily intended for the Christians of Judæa, *some of them* witnesses of the Crucifixion, and *all*, probably, familiar with the incidents of the Saviour's Judæan ministry, as well as with the events preceding and following the Passion, especially when we remember that the author had no intention (!) of writing a biography.<sup>1</sup>

Here the alleged fact that only *some* had seen the

<sup>1</sup> Work cited, p. 94.



Crucifixion, while *all* knew all about the ministry, is given as a reason why the ministry should be described and the Crucifixion left undescribed and unmentioned!

The problem thus impossibly disposed of is really of capital importance. Any complete solution must remain hypothetical in the nature of the case; but at least we are bound to recognize that the Primitive Gospel may have had a *different* conclusion, as it may further have contained matter not preserved in the synoptics. *That* might well be a sufficient ground for its abandonment by the Christian community; and some such suspicion simply cannot be excluded, though it cannot be proved. But whatever we may surmise as to what may have been in the original document, we can offer a decisive reason why the existing conclusion should not have been part of it. That conclusion is primarily extraneous to any gospel, and is not originally a piece of narrative at all.

Bernhard Weiss ascribes to Mark the original narrative of the closing events, making Matthew a simple copyist—a matter of no ultimate importance, seeing that it is the same impossible and unhistorical narrative in both documents. Like all the other professional exegetes, Bernhard Weiss and his school have failed to discern that the document reveals not only that it is not an original narrative at all, but that it could not possibly be a narrative. “It was only in the history of the passion,” writes Weiss, “that Mark could give a somewhat connected account partly of what he him-

self had seen and partly of what he gathered from those who witnessed the crucifixion.”<sup>1</sup> Whether “passion” here includes the Agony in the Garden is not clear: as it is expressly distinguished from the crucifixion, which Mark by implication had not seen, the meaning remains obscure. Like the ordinary traditionalists, Weiss assumes that “after Peter’s death Mark began to note down his recollections of what the Apostle had told him of the *acts and discourses* of Jesus.” Supposing this to include the record of the night of the Betrayal, what were Mark’s possible sources for the description of the Agony, with its prayers, its entrances and exits, when the only disciples present are alleged to have been asleep?

It is the inconceivable omission of the exegetes to face such problems that forces us finally to insist on their serious inadequacy in this regard. They laboriously conduct an investigation up to the point at which it leaves us, more certainly than ever, facing the incredible, and there they leave it. Their work is done. That the story of the Last Night was never framed as a narrative, but is primarily a drama, which the Gospel simply transcribes, is manifest in every section, and is definitely proved by the verses (Mk. xiv, 41–42) in which, without an intervening exit, Jesus says: “*Sleep on* now, and take your rest.....*Arise*, let us be going.” The moment the document is realized to be a transcript of a drama it becomes clear that the “Sleep on

<sup>1</sup> *Manual of Introd. to the N. T.*, Eng. tr. 1888, ii, 261.

now, and take your rest " should be inserted before the otherwise speechless exit in verse 40, where the text says that " they wist not what to answer him." Two divergent speeches have by an oversight in transcription been fused into one.

That the story of the tragedy is a separate composition has been partly perceived by critics of different schools without drawing any elucidating inference. Wellhausen pronounces that the Passion cannot be excepted from the verdict that Mark as a whole lacks the character of history. " Nothing is motived and explained by preliminaries."<sup>1</sup> But "*we learn as much about the week in Jerusalem as about the year in Galilee.*"<sup>2</sup> And the Rev. Mr. Wright gets further, though following a wrong track :—

The very fact that S. Mark devotes six chapters out of sixteen to events which took place in the precincts of Jerusalem makes me suspicious. Important though the passion was, *it seems to be narrated at undue length. The proportions of the history are destroyed.*<sup>3</sup>

Precisely. The story of the events in Jerusalem is no proper part either of a primary document or of the first or second Gospel. In its detail it has no congruity with the scanty and incoherent narrative of Mark. It is of another *provenance*, although, as Wellhausen notes, quite as unhistorical as the rest. The non-historicity of the entire action is as plain as in the case of any episode in the Gospels. Judas

<sup>1</sup> *Einleitung*, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> *Some N. T. Problems*, 1898, p. 176.

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is paid to betray a man who could easily have been arrested without any process of betrayal; and the conducting of the trial immediately upon the arrest, *throughout the night*, the very witnesses being "sought for" in the darkness, is plain fiction, explicable only by the dramatic obligation to continuous action.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE ALLEGED CONSENSUS OF SCHOLARS

SUCH is the historical *impasse* at which open-minded students find themselves when they would finally frame a reasoned conception of the origin of the Christian religion. The documentary analysis having yielded results which absolutely repel the accepted tradition, however denuded of supernaturalism, we are driven to seek a solution which shall be compatible with the data. And some of us, after spending many years in shaping a sequence which should retain the figure of the Founder and his twelve disciples, have found ourselves forced step by step to the conclusion that these are all alike products of myth, intelligible and explicable only as such. And when, in absolute loyalty to all the clues, with no foregone conclusions to support—unless the rejection of supernaturalism be counted such—we tentatively frame for ourselves a hypothesis of a remote origin in a sacramental cult of human sacrifice, with a probable Jesus-God for its centre in Palestine, we are not surprised at being met by the kind of explosion that has met every step in the disintegration of traditional beliefs from Copernicus to Darwin. The compendious Mr. Sinclair, who makes no pre-

tension to have read any of the works setting forth the new theories, thus describes them :—

The arguments of Baconians *and* mythomaniacs are alike made up of the merest blunders as to fact and the sheerest misunderstanding of the meaning of facts. Grotesque etymologies,<sup>1</sup> arbitrary and tasteless emendations of texts, forced parallels, unrestrained license of conjecture, the setting of conjecture above reasonably established fact, chains of argument in which every link is of straw, appeals to anti-theological bias and to the miserable egotism which sees heroes with the eyes of the valet—these are some of the formidable “evidences” in deference to which we are asked to reverse the verdicts of tradition, scholarship, and common sense. They have never imposed on anyone fairly conversant with the facts. Those who have not such knowledge may either simply appeal to the authority of scholars, OR, BETTER STILL, SUPPORT that authority by exercizing their own IMAGINATION AND COMMON SENSE.

That tirade has seemed to me worth preserving. It is perhaps a monition to scholars, whose function is something higher than vituperation, to note how their inadequacies are sought to be eked out by zeal without either scholarship or judgment, and, finally, without intellectual sincerity. The publicist who alternately tells the unread that they ought to accept the verdict of scholars, and that it is “better still”

<sup>1</sup> I have wasted a good deal of time in reading and in confuting the Baconians, but only in one or two of them have I met with any etymologies. Their doctrine had no such origin, and in no way rests on etymologies. Not once have I seen in their books an appeal to anti-theological bias, and hardly ever an emendation, though there are plenty of “forced parallels.” Nor are etymologies primary elements in any form of the myth theory. Mr. Sinclair seems to “unpack his mouth with words” in terms of a Shakespearean formula.

to "support" that verdict by unaided "imagination and common sense," has given us once for all his moral measure.

Dismissing him as having served his turn in illustrating compendiously the temper which survives in Unitarian as in Trinitarian traditionalism, we may conclude this preliminary survey with a comment on the proposition that we should take the "verdict of scholars." It has been put by men, themselves scholars in other fields, whom to bracket with Mr. Sinclair would be an impertinence. But I have always been puzzled by their attitude. They proceed upon three assumptions, which are all alike delusions. The first is that there *is* a consensus of scholars on the details of this problem. The second is that the professional scholars have a command of a quite recondite knowledge as regards the central issue. The third is that there is such a thing as professional *expertise* in the diagnosis of Gods, Demi-gods, and real Founders in religious history. Once more, the nature of the problem has not been realized.

Let us take first the case of a real scholar in the strictest sense of the term, Professor Gustaf Dalman, of Leipzig, author of "THE WORDS OF JESUS, considered in the light of Post-Biblical Jewish Writings and the Aramaic Language."<sup>1</sup> To me, Professor Dalman appears to be an expert of high competence, alike in Hebrew and Aramaic—a double qualification possessed by very few of those to whose "verdict"

<sup>1</sup> Eng. trans. by Prof. D. M. Kay, 1902,

we are told to bow. By his account few previous experts in the same field have escaped bad mis-carriages, as a handful of excerpts will show:—

M. Friedmann, *Onkelos und Akylas*, 1896, still holds fast to the traditional opinion that even Ezra had an Aramaic version of the Tora. In this he is mistaken.

H. Laible, in Dalman-Laible's *Jesus Christ in the Talmud*, etc., incorrectly refers it [the phrase "bastard of a wedded wife"] to Jesus. The discussion treats merely of the definition of the term "bastard."

Adequate proof for all three parts of this assertion [A. Neubauer's as to the use of Aramaic in parts of Palestine] is wanting.

F. Blass.....characterizes as Aramaisms idioms which in some cases are equally good Hebraisms, and in others are pure Hebraisms and not Aramaisms at all.

P. W. Schmiedel.....does not succeed in reaching any really tenable separation of Aramaisms and Hebraisms.

Resch entirely abandons the region of what is linguistically admissible.....And the statement of the same writer that this....."belongs very specially to the epic style of narration in the Old Testament" is incomprehensible.

The idioms discussed above.....show at once the incorrectness of Schmiedel's contention that the narrative style of the Gospels and the Acts is the best witness of the Greek that was spoken among the Jews. *The fact is that the narrative sections of the Synoptists have more Hebrew features than the discourses of Jesus communicated by them.*

Such a book as Wünsche's *Neue Beiträge*, by reason of quite superficial and inaccurate assertions and faulty translations, must even be characterized as directly misleading and confusing.

The want of due precaution in the use made of



[the Jerusalem Targums of the Pentateuch] by J. T. Marshall is one of the things which were bound to render his efforts to reproduce the "Aramaic Gospel" a failure.

Harnack supposes it to be an ancient Jewish conception that "everything of genuine value which successively appears upon earth has its existence in heaven—*i.e.*, it exists with God—meaning in the cognition of God, and therefore really." But this idea must be pronounced thoroughly un-Jewish, at all events un-Palestinian, although the medieval Kabbala certainly harbours notions of this sort.

Holtzmann.....thereby evinces merely his own ignorance of Jewish legal processes.

Especially must his [R. H. Charles's] attempts at retranslation [of the *Assumptio Mosis*] be pronounced almost throughout a failure.

[Even in the pertinent observations of Wellhausen and Nestle] we feel the absence of a careful separation of Hebrew and Aramaic possibilities.....He [Wellhausen] must be reminded that the Jewish literature to this day is still mainly composed in Hebrew.

These may suffice to illustrate the point. Few of the other experts escape Dalman's Ithuriel spear; and as he frankly confesses past blunders of his own, it is not to be doubted that some of the others have returned his thrusts.<sup>1</sup> Supposing then that this body of experts, so many of them deep in Aramaic, so opposed to each other on so many issues clearly within the field of their special studies, were to unite in affirming the historicity of the Gospel

<sup>1</sup> Wellhausen notably does—*Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien*, 1905, pp. 39–41. Dr. R. H. Charles, who in his masterly introduction to the *Assumption of Moses* indicates so many blunders of German scholars, may be reckoned quite able to criticize Dalman in his turn.

Jesus, what would their consensus signify? Simply that they were agreed in affirming the unknown, the improbable, and the unprovable, while they disputed over the known. Their special studies do not give them the slightest special authority to pronounce upon such an issue. It is one of historic inference upon a mass of data which they among them have made common property so far as it was not so already, in the main documents and in previous literature. Dalman, who takes for granted the historicity of Jesus and apparently of the tradition in general, pronounces (p. 9) that

the actual discourses of Jesus in no way give the impression that He had grown up in rural solitude and seclusion. *It is true only* that He, like the Galileans generally in that region, *would have* little contact with literary erudition.

If Professor Dalman cannot see that the proposition in the first sentence is extremely disturbing to the traditional belief in its Unitarian form, and that the second is a mere *petitio principii* which cannot save the situation, other people can see it. His scholarship gives him no "eminent domain" over logic; and it does not require a knowledge of Aramaic to detect the weakness of his reasoning. Fifty experts in Aramaic carry no weight for a thinking man on such a non-linguistic issue; and he who defers to them as if they did is but throwing away his birthright. When again Dalman writes (p. 60) that "Peter *must* have appeared (Acts x, 24) from a very early date as a preacher in the Greek language," he again raises an insoluble problem for

the traditionalists of all schools, and his scholarly status is quite irrelevant to that.

When, yet again, he writes (p. 71) that "what is firmly established is only the *fact* that Jesus spoke in Aramaic to the Jews," his mastery of Aramaic has nothing to do with the case. He is merely taking for granted the historicity of the main tradition; and until he faces the problems he has ignored (having, as he may fairly claim, been occupied with others), and repelled the criticisms which that tradition incurs, his vote on the unconsidered issue has no more value to a rational judgment than any other. I have seldom read a scholarly treatise more satisfying than his within its special field, or more provocative of astonishment at the extent to which specialism can close men's eyes to the problems which overlap or underlie theirs.

And *that* is the consideration that has to be realized by those who talk of scholarship (meaning simply what is called New Testament scholarship) settling a historical problem which turns upon anthropology, mythology, hierology, psychology, and literary and historical science in general. On these sides the scholars in question, "*Wir Gelehrten vom Fach*," as the German specialists call themselves in the German manner, are not experts at all, not even amateurs, inasmuch as they have never even realized that those other sciences are involved. They have fallen into the rôle of the pedant, properly so-called, who presumes to regulate life by inapplicable knowledge. And even those who are wholly free of this presumptuous pedantry, the sober, courteous,

and sane scholars like Professor Schmiedel, whose candour enables him to contribute a preface to such a book as Professor W. B. Smith's *DER VORCHRISTLICHE JESUS*, to whose thesis he does not assent—even these, as we have seen, can fail to realize the scope of the problem to the discussion of which they have contributed.

Professor Schmiedel's careful argument from "derogatory" episodes in the gospel of Mark, be it repeated, is not merely inconclusive; it elicits a rebuttal which turns it into a defeat. Inadequate even on the textual side, it is wholly fallacious on the hierological and the mythological; and no more than the ordinary conservative polemic does it recognize the sociological problem involved. For those who seek to study history comprehensively and comprehendingly, the residuum of the conservative case is a blank incredibility. Even Dalman, after the closest linguistic and literary analysis, has left the meaning of "the Kingdom of God" a conundrum;<sup>1</sup> and the conservative case finally consists in asserting that Christianity as a public movement arose in the simple *announcement* of that conundrum—the mere utterance of the formula—throughout Palestine by a body of twelve apostles, who for the rest "cast out devils," as instructed by their Teacher. The "scholarship" which contentedly rests facing that vacuous conception is a scholarship not qualified finally to handle a great historical problem as such. It conducts itself

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, 1909, pp. 65-66.



exactly as did Biblical scholarship so long in face of the revelations of geology, and as did Hebrew scholarship so long over the problem of the Tabernacle in the wilderness.

Deeply learned men, in the latter case, went on for generations solemnly re-writing history in the terms of the re-arranged documents, when all the while the history was historic myth—perceptible as such to a Zulu who *had* lived in a desert. And when the Zulu's teacher proved the case by simple arithmetic, he met at the hands alike of pedants and of pietists a volley of malignant vituperation, the "religious" expert Maurice excelling many of the most orthodox in the virulence of his scorn; while the pontifical Arnold, from the Olympian height of his amateurism, severely lectured Colenso for not having written in Latin.

Until the scholars and the amateurs alike renounce their own presumption, their thrice stultified airs of finality, their estimate of their prejudice and their personal equation as a revelation from within, and their sacerdotal conviction that their science is *the* science of every case, they will have to be unkindly reminded that they are but blunderers like other men, that in their own specialties they convict each other of errors without number, and that the only path to truth is that of the eternal free play and clash of all manner of criticism. It is an exceptionally candid orthodox scholar who writes: "It is a law of the human mind that combating error is the best way to advance knowledge. They who have never joined in controversy have no firm grasp of

truth. Hateful and unchristian as theological disputes are apt to become, they have this merit, that they open our eyes."<sup>1</sup> Let the conservative disputants then be content to put their theses and their arguments like other men, to meet argument with argument when they can, and to hold their peace when they have nothing better to add than boasts and declamation.

Before the end of the nineteenth century the very school which we are asked to regard as endowed with quasi-papal powers in matters of historical criticism was declared by one of its leading representatives in Germany to have been on a wrong track for fifty years. In the words of Professor Blass:—

Professor Harnack, in his most recent publication, even while stating that now the tide has turned, and that theology, after having strayed in the darkness and led others into darkness (see Matt. xv, 14) for about fifty years, has now got a better insight into things, and has come to a truer appreciation of the real trustworthiness of tradition, still puts Mark's gospel between 65 and 70 A.D., Matthew's between 70 and 75, but Luke's much later, about 78-93.<sup>2</sup>

And Blass, who dates Luke 56 or 60, goes on:—

Has that confessedly untrustworthy guide of laymen, scientific theology, after so many errors committed during fifty years, now of a sudden become a trustworthy one? Or have we good reason to mistrust it as much, or even more than we had before? *In ordinary life no sane person would follow a guide who confessed to having grossly misled him during the whole former part of the journey. Evidently that guide was either utterly*

<sup>1</sup> Rev. A. Wright, *Some New Testament Problems*, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> Blass, *Philology of the Gospels*, 1898, p. 35.

*ignorant of the way*, or he had some views and aims of his own, of which the traveller was unaware, and he cannot be assumed now to have acquired a full knowledge, or to have laid those views and aims wholly aside.

Thus does one *Gelehrter vom Fach* estimate the pretensions of a whole sanhedrim of another *Fach*. Blass is a philologist; and incidentally we have seen how another philologist, Dalman, handles him in that capacity. Elsewhere, after another fling at the theological scholars—with a salvo of praise to Harnack for his *LUKAS DER ARZT*—and a comment on the fashion in which every German critic swears by his master, he avows that “we classical philologists.....have seen similar follies among ourselves in fair number.”<sup>1</sup> It is most true; and the philologists are as much divided as the theologians.

Of course, it is not by philology that Blass has reached the standpoint from which he can condemn the professional theologians. He is really on the same ground as they, making the same primary assumptions of historicity: the only difference is that while they, following the same historical tradition, yet scruple to accept prophecies as having been actually made at the time assigned to them, and feel bound to date the prophecy after the event, the consistent philologist recognizes no such obligation in the present instance, and puts a rather adroit but very unscholarly argument on the subject, with which we shall have to deal later. But for those to whom the exact dating of the

<sup>1</sup> *Die Entstehung und der Charakter unserer Evangelien*, 1907, p. 9.

Gospels is a subsidiary problem, his argument has only a subsidiary interest; and the fact that he unquestioningly agrees with his flouted theological colleagues in accepting the historicity of Jesus gives no importance to their consensus.

If, as he says, they are in the mass utterly untrustworthy guides on *any* historical issue (an extravagance to which, as a layman, I do not subscribe), their agreement can be of no value to him where he and they coincide. After telling Harnack that men who have confessedly been astray for fifty years have no right to expect to be listened to, he makes much of Harnack's support as to the historicity of the Acts—a course which will not impose upon thoughtful readers. All the while, of course, Professor Blass is simply applying a revised historical criticism to a single issue or set of issues, and even if he chance to be right on these he has set up no new historical method. No more than the others has he recognized the central historical problem; and he must be well aware that that reversion to tradition announced by Harnack, and at this point acquiesced in by him, cannot for a moment be maintained as a general critical principle in regard to the New Testament any more than in regard to the Old. All that he can claim is that many theologians have confessedly blundered seriously on historical problems. But that is quite enough to justify us in admonishing the mere middlemen and the experts alike to change the tone of absurd assurance with which they meet further innovations of historical theory.



## CHAPTER VIII

### CONSERVATIVE POSITIONS

It is only just to confess that the conservatives are already learning to employ some prudential expedients. Met by the challenge to their own nakedly untenable positions, and offered a constructive hypothesis, diversely elaborated from various quarters, they mostly evade the discussion at nearly every point where the impossible tradition is concretely confronted by a thinkable substitute, and spend themselves over the remoter issues of universal mythology. Habitually misrepresenting every argument from comparative mythology as an assertion of a historical sequence in the compared data, they expatiate over questions of etymology, and are loud in their outcry over a suggestion that a given historical sequence may be surmised from data more or less obscure. But to the question how the evangel could possibly have begun as the record represents, or how the consummation could possibly have taken place as described, they either attempt no answer whatever or offer answers which are worse than evasions. One professional disputant, dealing with the proposition that such a judicial and police procedure as the systematic search for witnesses described in the Gospel story of the Trial *could not* take place by night, "when an Eastern

city is as a city of the dead," did not scruple to say that the thesis amounted to saying that in an Eastern city nothing could happen by night. This controversialist is an instructor of youth, and claims to be an instructed scholar. And his is the only answer that I have seen to the challenge with which it professes to deal. Loisy agrees that the challenge cannot be met.

To the hypothesis that there was a pre-Christian cult of a Jesus-God, the traditionalist—above all, the Unitarian, who seems to feel the pinch here most acutely—retorts with a volley of indignant contempt. *He* can see no sign of any such cult. In the mind's eye he can see, as a historic process, twelve Apostles creating a Christian community by simply crying aloud that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, excommunicating for the after life those who will not listen, and all the while assiduously casting out devils. His records baldly tell him that this happened; and "we believe in baptism because we have seen it done." But whereas, in the nature of the case, the reconstruction of the real historic process must be by tentative inference from a variety of data which for the most part the records as a matter of course obscured, he makes loud play with the simple fact that the records lack the required clear mention, and brands as "unsupported conjecture" the theorem offered in place of the plain untruth with which he has so long been satisfied.

In his own sifted and "primitive" records we have the narration of the carrying of the Divine

Man to a height ("pinnacle of the temple" *only* in the supposed primitive Gospel) by Satan for purposes of temptation. For a mythologist this myth easily falls into line as a variant of the series of Pan and the young Zeus at the altar on the mountain top, Pan and Apollo competing on the top of Mount Tmolus, Apollo and Marsyas, all deriving from the Babylonian figures of the Goat-God (Capricorn) and the Sun-God on the Mountain of the World, representing the starting of the sun on his yearly course. That assignment explains at once the Pagan myths and the Christian, which is thus shown to have borrowed from the myth material of the Greco-Oriental world in an early documentary stage. Challenged to evade that solution, he mentions only the Pan-Zeus story, says nothing of the series of variants or of the Babylonian original, and replies that he is

unable to trace any real and fundamental connection between the stories. In the Buddhist narrative [which had been cited as an analogue<sup>1</sup>] the "temptation" to satisfy the cravings of hunger, the promptings of ambition, and the doubts as to the overruling Providence of God, are all wanting. In the Roman story, too, Pan, as representing in satyr-form the

<sup>1</sup> With the customary bad faith of the orthodox apologist, Dr. Thorburn represents as a sudden change of thesis the proposition that "the Christian narrative is merely an ethical adaptation of the Greek story," because that proposition follows on the remark that the Christian myth "*might* fairly be regarded" [as it actually has been] "as a later sophistication" of the Buddhist myth. On this "*might*" there had actually followed, in the text quoted, the statement: "There are fairly decisive reasons, however, for concluding that the Christian story was evolved on another line." This sentence Dr. Thorburn conceals from his readers. There had been no change of thesis whatever.

lower and animal propensities of man, *is a very different being to the Hebrew Satan*; moreover, there is no tempting of Jupiter, as there is of Jesus. Jupiter, likewise, is wholly a god; *Jesus is a sorely bested Man, although divine*. There is, in short, not the least affinity between any of these narratives beyond the general idea of trial.<sup>1</sup>

And this figures as a refutation. For our traditionalist, comparative mythology does not and cannot exist; for him there can be no fundamental connection between any two nominal myths unless they are absolutely identical in all their details; and the goat-footed Pan and the goat-footed Satan (certainly descended from the Goat-God Azazel) are merely "very different beings," though Satan for the later Jews and Jesuists actually corresponded to Pan (who is *not* a mere satyr for the Greeks) not only in being the spirit of concupiscence<sup>2</sup> but in being "the God of this world," as the Gospel myth in effect shows him to be. And this exhibition of ignorance of every principle of mythology passes for "scholarship," and will be duly so certificated by Sir William Robertson Nicoll, who undertakes to preside in that department, as in politics, with about equal qualifications.

By way of constructive solution of the problem we have from the apologist this:—

If a conjecture may be hazarded here, we should be inclined to say that the Christian narrative

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Dr. T. J. Thorburn, *Jesus the Christ: Historical or Mythical?*, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Thorburn appears to be wholly unaware of this fact of Jewish theology. See Dr. Schechter's *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, 1909, ch. xv; Kalisch, *Comm. on Leviticus*, ii, 304.



largely presents, in picturesque and symbolic form, the subjective experiences and doubts of Jesus—*whether* these were of internal origin merely, or were suggested externally by *some* malignant spiritual being—as to His capacities and power for the great work which He had undertaken.

The thoroughly orthodox, it would appear, must still be catered for, albeit only by the concession of the possibility of “some” malignant spiritual being, which seems a gratuitous slight to the canonical Satan, whose moral dignity had immediately before been acclaimed. But, after expressly insisting on the elements of “temptation” and “ambition” in the story, with the apparent implication that the young Teacher may have had a passing ambition to become a world conqueror, our exegete, in conclusion, collapses to the position of the German exegetes who, the other day, were still debating on the spiritual interpretation of what they could not perceive to be a pure myth of art.

At this stage of enlightenment we hear allusions to “psychology,” though I have not yet met with any explicit pretence that the traditionalist scholars know anything about psychology that is not known to the rest of us. In any case, the suggestion may be hazarded that the first researches they make into psychology might usefully be directed to their own, which is a distressing illustration of the survival of the intellectual methods of the ancient apologists for the Vedas and for the mythology of the Greeks.

A severe scrutiny of psychic processes is indeed highly necessary in this as in so many other disputes in which the affections wrestle with the reason.

Such a process of analysis gives us the real causation of the testimony borne by Mill, which is so widely typical. For non-religious as for religious minds the conception they form of the Gospel Jesus is commonly a resultant of a few dominant impressions, varying in each case but all cognate. Jesus is figured first to the recipient spirit as a blessed babe in the arms of an idealized mother, and last as dying on the cross, cruelly tortured for no crime—the supreme example of the martyred philanthropist. In the interim he figures as commanding his dull disciples to “Suffer little children to come unto me,” and as “going about doing good,” all the while preaching forgiveness and brotherly love. No knowledge of the impossibility of most of the particularized cures will withhold even instructed men from soothing their sensibilities by crediting the favourite figure with some vague “healing power” and talking of the possibilities of “faith healing,” even as they loosely accredit some elevating quality, some practical purport, to the visionary evangel, so absolutely mythical that the Gospel writers can tell us not a word of its matter.

Even Professor Schmiedel, expressly applying the tests of naturalism, negates those tests at the outset by taking for granted the Teacher’s possession of unquantified “psychic” healing powers, though the narratives twenty times tell of cures which cannot possibly be described as cases of faith-healing.<sup>1</sup> If for the sane inquirer the absolute

<sup>1</sup> The Nemesis of this uncritical method appears in its development at the hands of Dr. Conybeare: “That Jesus was a *successful*

miracle stories are false, and *these* stories are false, by what right does he allot evidential value to wholesale allegations of multitudinous cures from the same sources? By the sole right of his predilections. The measure which he metes to the thousand prodigies in Livy is never meted to those of the Gospels. For him, these are different things, being seen in another atmosphere.

In men concerned to be intellectually law-abiding, these dialectic divagations are decently veiled; by others they are passionately flaunted. No recollection of the anger of Plato at those who denied that the Sun and Planets were divine and blessed beings can withhold certain professed scholars from the same angry folly in a similar predicament. But even where theological animus has been in a manner disciplined by the long professional battle over documentary problems, the sheer lack of logical challenge on fundamental issues has left all the disputants alike, down till the other day, taking for granted data to which they had no critical right.

Throughout the whole debate, even in the case of scholars who profess to be loyal to induction, we find that there is a presupposition upon which induction has no effect. Bernhard Weiss, quoting from Holtzmann the profoundly subversive proposition that "Christianity has been 'book-learning' from the beginning," in reply "can only say, God

*exorcist* we need not doubt, nor that he worked innumerable faith cures" (*Myth, Magic, and Morals*, 2nd. ed., p. 142). Such a writer "need not doubt" anything he wants to believe. In particular he "need not doubt" that the disciples were "successful exorcists" also.

be praised that it is not so." Yet the real effect of his own research is to show us much—to show that there was no oral evangel, that the formula of "the kingdom of heaven" is but a phrase to fill a blank. Even candid inquirers who see the difficulty, like Samuel Davidson, leave it unsolved. Says Davidson:—

When we try to form a correct view of Jesus's utterances regarding this Kingdom of God, we find they have much vagueness and ambiguity. Their differences also in the Synoptic Gospels and the fourth are so apparent that the latter must be left out of account in any attempt to get a proper sketch of Jesus's hopes. His apostles and other early reporters misunderstood some of His sayings, making them crasser. Oral tradition marred their original form. This is specially the case with respect to the enthusiastic hopes about the kingdom He looked for. But as the ideal did not become actual we must rest in the great fact that the Christianity He introduced was the nucleus of a perfect system adapted to universal humanity.<sup>1</sup>

"We must" do no such thing. We "must" draw a licit inference. The alleged great fact is morally a chimera, and historically a hallucination. To admit that all the evidence collapses, and then to posit the visionary gospel with a "must," is to abandon critical principle. The "must" is simply the eternal presupposition. And the choice of the sincere student "must" be between that negation of science and a fresh scientific search, from which the presupposition, as such, is excluded. If it can reappear as a licit conclusion, so be it. But it has never yet arisen.

<sup>1</sup> *Introd. to the N. T.*, 3rd. ed., i, 4.



## CHAPTER IX

### BLASS AND FLINDERS PETRIE

A VERY interesting attempt to bring the synoptic problem to a new critical test has latterly been made by Dr. Flinders Petrie in his work, *THE GROWTH OF THE GOSPELS AS SHOWN BY STRUCTURAL CRITICISM* (1910). His starting point is the likelihood that *logia*, analogous to the non-canonical fragments discovered in recent years, were the original material from which the Gospels were built up. The hypothesis is *prima facie* quite legitimate, there being nothing to repel it. As he contends, there is now evidence that writing was in much more common use in some periods of antiquity than scholars had formerly supposed; and scraps of writing by non-scholarly persons, he argues, may have been widely current in the environment with which we are concerned. All the while he is founding on data from the Egypt of the third century for a Palestinian environment of the first; and he is obliged to stress the point that Matthew the tax-gatherer was a "professional scribe," while his argument runs that Matthew used the detached jottings of other people, not his own. But let us follow out his thesis:—

We cannot doubt [writes Dr. Petrie] that such was the course of growth when we look at the

*logia*. Those collections of brief sayings could hardly have come into existence if full narratives and sufficient standards of information in the Gospels were already circulating. They belong essentially to a preparatory age, when records were in course of compilation. But, once written out, they naturally survived side by side with the Gospels, which had only used a portion of their material.<sup>1</sup>

It is not quite clear whether Dr. Petrie meant here to claim not only that the so-called LOGIA IESOU published in 1897 and 1904 are anterior to and independent of the Gospels (though found only in third-century MSS.), but that they are on the same footing of credibility with the Gospels. This, however, seems inevitably to follow from his position, though it appears to suggest to him no difficulty about the general historicity of the Gospel story, which he too takes for granted. Let us then note the problems raised.

A main feature of Dr. Petrie's inquiry is that, following Professor Blass, he insists on making the predictions of the fall of Jerusalem part of the early documentary matter collected in the "Nucleus" which for him is the equivalent of Weiss's Primitive Gospel. The argument of Blass<sup>2</sup> is drawn from the case of Savonarola, who in 1496 predicted that Rome would be sacked, and that horses would be stabled in the churches, as actually happened in the year 1527. If such a prophecy could be made and

<sup>1</sup> Work cited, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Put in the *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 1896, p. 964 sq.; and *Philology of the Gospels*, 1898, pp. 41-43. Professor Blass has worked this argument diligently. See his *Die Entstehung und der Charakter unserer Evangelien*, 1907, p. 24.

fulfilled in one case, urges Blass, it might be in another ; hence there can be no rigorous application of the canon, *Omne vaticinium post eventum*, which has been relied on by the modern school of critical theologians. Dr. Petrie appears to have made no investigation of his own, being content to quote and support Blass ; and the point is well worth critical consideration.

Let us premise that scientific criticism, which has no concern with Unitarian predilections, stands quite impartially towards the question of Gospel dates. The modern tendency to carry down those dates, either for the whole or for any parts of the Gospels, towards or into the second century, is originally part of the general "liberal" inclination to put a Man in place of a God, though some believers in the God acquiesce as to the lateness of the act of writing. Those who have carried on the movement have always presupposed the general historicity of the Teacher, and have been concerned, however unconsciously, to find a historical solution which saved that presupposition. The rational critic, making only the naturalist presupposition, is committed to no set of documentary dates. And he is not at all committed to the denial that an inductive historic prediction, as distinguished from a supernaturalist prophecy, may be made and fulfilled. Many have been. Much has been said of the "marvellous prescience" of Burke in predicting that the anarchy of the French Revolution would end in a tyranny. He was in fact merely inferring, as he well might, that what had happened in the

history of ancient Rome and in the history of England would happen in France. By a similar historical method several French and other writers in the eighteenth century reached the forecast of the revolt of the American colonies from Britain without getting any credit for divine inspiration. And so, perhaps, might Savonarola at the end of the fifteenth century predict a sack of Rome, and a Jew in the first century a sack of Jerusalem.

But let us see what Savonarola actually did. He was, so to speak, a professional prophet, and while he predicted not only a sack of Rome but his own death by violence, he also, by the admission of sympathetic biographers, put forth many vaticinations of an entirely fantastic character. Here again he might very well have a Jewish prototype. For us the first question is, What did he actually predict in history, and how and why did he predict it? In 1494 he seems to have predicted the French invasion which took place in that year. Villari asserts that he did so in the sermons he preached in Lent, but admits that "it is impossible to ascertain the precise nature" of the sermons in question.<sup>1</sup> Father Lucas goes further, and points out that there is no trace in them of the alleged prophecy<sup>2</sup> which Savonarola in his *Compendium Revelationum* (1495) claims to have made but does not date. Villari further admits that the sermons of that year are so badly reported

<sup>1</sup> Villari, *Life of Savonarola*, Eng. trans. 1-vol. ed. p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Lucas, S.J., *Fra Girolamo Savonarola*, 2nd ed. 1906, p. 116. Father Lucas does not deny that such a sermon might possibly have been preached late in 1493. Cp. p. 118.



as to have lost almost every characteristic of Savonarola's style. Their reporter, unable to keep pace with the preacher's words, only jotted down rough and fragmentary notes. These were afterwards translated into barbarous dog-Latin—by way of giving them a more literary form—and published in Venice. For this reason Quétif and some other writers entertained doubts of their authenticity.<sup>1</sup>

Villari nevertheless is satisfied of it on internal grounds, and we may accept his estimate. The main allegation is that in 1494 Savonarola, who had for years been preaching that national sin would elicit divine chastisement,

in those Lenten discourses, *and also in some others*, foretold the coming of a new Cyrus, who would march through Italy in triumph, without encountering any obstacles, and without breaking a single lance. We find numerous records of these predictions, and the terrors excited by them, in the historians and biographers of the period; and Fra Benedetto reports his master's words in the following verses [thus literally translated] :—

Soon shalt thou see each tyrant overthrown,  
And all Italy shalt thou see vanquished,  
To her shame, disgrace, and harm.  
Thou, Rome, shalt soon be captured :  
I see the blade of wrath come upon thee ;  
The time is short, each day flies past :

My Lord will renovate the Church,  
And convert every barbarian people.  
There will be but one fold and one shepherd.  
But first Italy will have to mourn,  
And so much of her blood will be shed  
That her people shall everywhere be thinned.

Here there is obvious confusion, apart from the fact that the predicted regeneration and unification of the church never took place. The invader is to do no fighting, and yet so much blood will be shed that everywhere the people of Italy will be thinned. Are we, then, to believe that the "Cyrus" prediction was made at the same time? Is there not ground for suspicion that it was interpolated *post eventum*, in the Latin report? The only alternative solution seems to be that Villari or the Italian compiler has mixed prophecies of different years. In his sermon of November 1, 1494, Savonarola speaks of the French invasion as the "scourge" he had predicted<sup>1</sup>—an odd way of speaking of one promised before as "the Lord's anointed," even though the French host is said to be "led by the Lord." In any case his own claim to have predicted of "Cyrus" is unsupported by evidence, and, even if accepted, does not involve a date earlier than 1493-4.<sup>2</sup>

To predict the invasion of Italy by Charles VIII of France in Lent of 1494, or even late in 1493, was easy enough.<sup>3</sup> The invasion had been fully prepared, and was expected, even as was the Armada in the England of 1588. Savonarola was very likely to have inside knowledge of the scheme, and the Pope positively charged him with having helped to engineer it. Florence in effect received

<sup>1</sup> Villari, p. 214.

<sup>2</sup> See the investigation of Father Lucas, pp. 114-18.

<sup>3</sup> I had written this, and the confutation of Villari, before reading the work of Father Lucas.

Charles as a friend. There had been, further, abundant discussion of the expedition both in France and Italy long before it set out. Guicciardini tells that wise Frenchmen were very apprehensive about it, and that Ferdinand of Naples reckoned that it must fail. Fail it finally did. Savonarola might even predict that the invader would not be resisted, for there was no force ready in Italy to repel that led by Charles, with its great train of artillery. It is an extreme oversight of Villari's to allege<sup>1</sup> that in the autumn, "unexpectedly as a thunderclap from a clear sky, came the news that a flood of foreign soldiery was pouring down from the Alps to the conquest of Italy.....All felt taken unawares." This assertion is completely exploded by the record of Guicciardini, and no historian will now endorse it. Lodovico Sforza, Duke of Milan, had incited Charles to the invasion; the preparations had been open and extensive; and they had been abundantly discussed both in France and Italy.<sup>2</sup> The statement that "the Friar alone had foreseen the future" is absolute myth.

The fact remains that the invasion was not resisted, and that Rome was "captured" in the sense of being entered by Charles, who did no military damage and marched out again. But when Charles proceeded to withdraw from Italy,

<sup>1</sup> As cited, p. 189. Father Lucas comments more mildly on the misstatement; but it is really a grave departure from historical truth.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Lucas, p. 117 *note*.

having effected nothing, a battle was fought and won by him. It was two years later that Savonarola, acting on his standing doctrine that sin in high places must elicit divine vengeance, resumed his predictions of disaster to Rome, whose Pope was his enemy. As it happened, 1496 was again a year of expected invasions. Charles, now the ally of Florence, was announced to be preparing for a second inroad, and the apprehensive Sforza invited and furthered the intervention of the emperor Maximilian as he had before invited Charles. Predictions were again to be expected; at Bologna at least one was actually made; and the prophet, one Raffaele da Firenzuola, was tortured and banished.<sup>1</sup> Charles gave up his plan, but Maximilian came, albeit with a small force, and was welcomed by the Pisans.

It was before the coming of Maximilian<sup>2</sup> that Savonarola resumed his prophecy of the coming scourge in a series of sermons, in one of which he announces that Italy will be overwhelmed because she is full of sanguinary deeds; that Rome will be besieged and trampled down; and that because her churches have been full of harlots they will be made "stables for horses and swine, the which will be less displeasing to God than seeing them made haunts of prostitutes.....Then, O Italy, trouble after

<sup>1</sup> Lucas, p. 129 note.

<sup>2</sup> This, again, he might well expect, as he avows that he had correspondents in Germany who applauded his attitude towards the Papacy. Villari, pp. 439, 519, 609. But Maximilian was invited by Sforza in the name of the Papal League, by way of forestalling Charles. *Id.* p. 458.



trouble shall befall thee; troubles of war after famine, troubles of pestilence after war." Again, in another sermon: "There will not be enough men left to bury the dead; nor means enough to dig graves.....The dead will be heaped in carts and on horses; they will be piled up and burnt.....And the people shall be so thinned that few shall remain."<sup>1</sup> At the same time he repeatedly predicted his own death by violence.

On the latter head he had abundant reason for his forecast. On the former it is very certain that he was not thinking of something that was not to happen for thirty years. Again and again he assured his hearers and his correspondents that his predictions were to be fulfilled "in our time." Towards the end of 1496 he described himself as "The servant of Christ Jesus, sent by him to the city of Florence to announce the great scourge which is to come upon Italy, and especially upon Rome, *and which is to extend itself over all the world in our days and quickly.*"<sup>2</sup> In 1497, in a letter to Lodovico Pittorio, chancellor to d'Este, after speaking of the Lord's prediction of the fall of Jerusalem, he writes: "Great tribulations are always [*i.e.* in the Scriptures] predicted many years before they come. Yet I do not say that the tribulations which I have foretold will be so long in coming; *nay, they will come soon; indeed I say that the tribulation has already commenced.*"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Villari, pp. 411-13. Cp. Perrens's *Jérôme Savonarole*, 1854, ii, 88 sq., 95 sq.; Lucas, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> *Manifesto A tutti li Christiani*; Lucas, p. 236. <sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 256.

Yet again, in 1498, he claims in a sermon that "a part has come to pass," noting that "in Rome one has lost a son"—a reference to the murder of the Duke of Gandia, son of the Pope; and adding that "you have seen who has died here, and I could tell you, an I would, who is in hell"—supposed to be a reference to Bernardo del Nero.<sup>1</sup> All this was in terms of Savonarola's theological and Biblical conception of things, the ruling political philosophy of his age, as of many before. Wickedness and injustice, fraud and oppression, were dominant in high places, and God must of necessity punish, in the fashion in which he was constantly described as doing so in the Sacred Books, from the Deluge downwards. In Savonarola's view the cup of Rome's abominations was full, and punishment had been earned by the men then living, in particular by Pope Alexander.

Within two years Savonarola had been put to death, after many tortures; and Alexander died in 1503 (not by poison, as the tradition goes) without having seen the predicted desolation. It was under the more respectable of the two Medicean Popes that Rome was twice sacked in 1527 by the forces of Charles V; and though there had been infinite slaughter and pestilence in Italy, the regeneration and reunion of Christendom predicted by Savonarola did not follow. When no reform whatever had followed on the French invasion he had explained that his prediction in that case was subject to

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 278.

conditions. Yet he announced that his prophecy of the conversion of the Turks was unconditional, declaring at the close of the *Compendium Revelationum* that it would be fulfilled in fifteen years, and assuring his hearers in 1495 that some of them would live to see the fulfilment.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lucas, p. 70.

## CHAPTER X

### THE SAVONAROLA FALLACY

OUR business, of course, is not to expose the prophetic miscarriages of Savonarola, but simply to make clear what manner of thing his prophesying was.<sup>1</sup> It was an instance of a kind of vaticination as old as Troy and Jerusalem, which had gone on in Christendom for centuries. Long before his day religious men had predicted wars, pestilences, famines, and the conversion of the Turks.<sup>2</sup> The wars and plagues and famines were very safe prognostications: they came in every decade. And when we come to his alleged prediction of the sack of Rome we realize immediately, not only that the one detail of coincidence is wholly fortuitous, but that, like his predecessors, he was simply predicting a return of common evils already experienced a hundred times.<sup>3</sup>

The argument of Blass and others on this topic, confidently accepted and endorsed by Dr. Petrie, works out as sheer mystification. They lay special

<sup>1</sup> Nor are we here concerned with the question of Savonarola's "sincerity." On that head it may be noted that Perrens the Rationalist and Lucas the sympathetic and moderate Catholic are very much at one.

<sup>2</sup> Lucas, p. 69 *note*. Compare the references of Lucas and those of Villari (p. 317) for researches on the subject.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. Perrens, as cited, ii, 94.



stress on the fact that in the sack of 1527 horses were stabled in the churches. It is likely enough: the same thing has been done a thousand times in the wars of Christendom. But the argument has been very negligently conducted. In the first place, though he tells of infinitely worse things, such as the wholesale violation of women, including nuns, the historian Guicciardini does not give the detail about the horses. That occurs in the document *Il Sacco di Roma*, ascribed latterly to his brother Luigi, which was first printed in 1664. Still, let us assume that the printing was faithful. If an interpolator had meant to vindicate Savonarola he would presumably have noted that the prophet specified not only horses but pigs, whereas the narrative says nothing of the latter. We are thus left with the item of the stabling of horses in the churches.

Here we have to note that as regards the main event Savonarola is predicting a thing that had repeatedly happened in Catholic times, and that as regards the minor details he is speaking with his eye on Jewish history. It was not the mere presence of horses and pigs in churches that he meant to stress, but the defilement that they brought. In the case of the Jewish Temple the "abomination of desolation" had been understood to include the defiling of the altar with swine's flesh.<sup>1</sup> This, in all likelihood, was the origin of Savonarola's prediction as to the bringing of pigs

<sup>1</sup> 1 Mac. i, 47, 54, 59.

into the sanctuary at Rome, which, as we have seen, was not fulfilled.

But there was nothing new about a Catholic sack of Rome. The city had been hideously sacked and in large part destroyed under Gregory VII (1084) by Robert Guiscard, *the Pope's ally*, after having been captured without sacking by the German Emperor. It just missed being sacked by Frederick II in 1239. In 1413 it was captured by Ladislaus of Naples, who gave all Florentine property in the city to pillage. No question of heresy arose in these episodes; nor did the forces of the Church itself blench at either sack or sacrilege. Faenza was foully sacked in 1376 by Hawkwood, called in for its defence by the bishop of Ostia; and in 1377 the same *condottiere* massacred the population of Cesena under the express and continuous orders of Robert, Cardinal of Geneva, the papal legate, afterwards the "anti-pope" Clement VII. No more bestial massacre took place in the pandemonium of the fourteenth century; and the sacking of the churches and the violation of the nuns was on the scale of the bloodshed.<sup>1</sup> In view of the endless atrocities of the wars of the Church and of Christendom there is a certain ripe absurdity about the exegetical comments on the subject of the sack of Rome in 1527. Says Blass:—

Especially remarkable is this, that he [Savonarola] extends the devastation to the churches of Rome, which in any *ordinary capture* (!) by a Catholic army would have been spared, but in this case were

<sup>1</sup> Refs. in De Potter, *L'Esprit de l'Église*, 1821, iv, 95-98.

not at all respected, because a great part of the conquering army consisted of German Lutherans, for whom the Roman Catholic churches were rather objects of hatred and contempt than of veneration. Now Lutheranism did not exist in 1496.<sup>1</sup>

And Dr. Petrie adds: "Such a detail seemed excessively unlikely before the rise of Lutheranism; yet it came to pass."<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to realize the notions held by scholars of such standing in regard to European history after a century signalized by so much historic research; and to find that such an ignorant proposition as that just cited should for Dr. Petrie "explode the dogma" that really fulfilled prophecies<sup>3</sup> have been framed *post eventum*.

For centuries before Luther the desecration of churches was a regular feature in every Christian war of any extent. It is arguable, perhaps, that in the sack of Rome the German troops might have made a special display of that mania for ordure as an instrument of war of which we have had such circumstantial accounts from Belgium of late, and of which similar details have been preserved in the domestic history of Paris since 1870.<sup>4</sup> But the stabling of horses in churches was a familiar act of warfare, often explicable by the simple fact that the horses of an army could not otherwise be accommodated. The clerical chroniclers mention such

<sup>1</sup> *Philology of the Gospels*, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Growth of the Gospels*, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> Professed prophecies, that is, not political calculations.

<sup>4</sup> The systematic deposition of ordure in the drawers of *commodes* in 1870, in beds and rooms and on piles of food in 1914, is a historical fact. As to the sack of Rome, Cantù's account is: "Delle bolle papali stabbiano i cavalli" (*Istoria degli Italiani*, ed. 1876, ix, 372).

things when they can tell a tale of the divine vengeance. Thus Spelman tells how "Richard, Robert, and Anesgot, sons of William Sorenge, in the time of William Duke of Normandy, wasting the country about Say, invaded the church of St. Gervase, lodging their soldiers there, and making it a stable for their horses. God deferred not the revenge."<sup>1</sup> In 1098 "the Earl of Shrewsbury made a dog-kennel of the church of St. Fridank, laying his hounds in it for the night-time; but in the morning he found them mad."<sup>2</sup> The putting of cattle in churches was sometimes a necessity of defensive warfare. In 1358, according to Jean de Venette, many unfortified villages in France made citadels of their churches to defend themselves from brigands;<sup>3</sup> and in such cases the animals would be taken indoors. Fine churches, on the other hand, were often burned in the wars of that period.<sup>4</sup> And when the Turks invaded Friuli in 1477 and 1478, burning and ravaging,<sup>5</sup> they were likely enough to have stabled their horses in churches. It was probably of the Turks that Savonarola was thinking, predicting as he so constantly did their speedy conversion to Christianity.

Lutheranism can have had very little to do with the matter: the brutality of the German *Lanzknechts* was notorious long before Luther was heard of. But there was nothing specially German

<sup>1</sup> *History of Sacrilege*, 1698, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> Zeller, *L'histoire de France racontée par les contemporains*, vol. 21, p. 102.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* vol. 22, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Sismondi-Tocagni, *Storia delle repub. ital.*, 1852, iv, 123.



in the matter either. The Italian *condottieri* in general were "full of contempt for all sacred things."<sup>1</sup> It is instructive to note that Savonarola predicts nothing of the wholesale violation of nuns and other women which was to take place at Rome as it had done in a hundred other sacks of cities: he must have known that these things happened; but the thing that appealed to his imagination was the theological pollution resulting from putting horses and pigs in churches. He was not predicting: he was remembering. Long before his time, besides, Church Councils had to pass edicts against the use of churches as barns in time of peace.

It will be remembered that his main items are slaughters, famines, and pestilences. There was famine and pestilence in Florence when he was prophesying in 1496; there was more in 1497;<sup>2</sup> and a terrible pestilence had visited Venice during the Turkish invasions of 1477 and 1478. The preacher's description of a plague in a city is an account of what had happened a dozen times in the history of Florence, before and after *the* Plague which figures in the forefront of Boccaccio's *DECAMERON*. Preaching from the text of Amos, he arraigns Italy and Rome as Amos arraigns Israel and Judah; and his menaces are the menaces of the Hebrew prophet, immeasurable slaughters, famine, pestilence, and captivity, with the old corollary of regeneration and restoration, in the case of Italy and the Church as in the case of

<sup>1</sup> Burckhardt, *Renaissance in Italy*, Eng. tr., ed. 1892, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Villari, pp. 463, 532, 554-55.

Israel. And his added detail of church desecration is at once a Biblical idea and a familiar item from Christian history.

In the historic crusade against the Albigenses in 1209, when Béziers was captured and every human being therein slain, seven thousand were, by the famous order of the Papal Legate,<sup>1</sup> put to the sword in the great church of St. Mary Magdalene, to which they had fled for sanctuary; and the whole city, with its churches, was burned to the ground. During the Hundred Years' War between England and France, says a social historian, a cleric—

in the rural districts of France the passage of the ravagers was traced by blackened ruins, by *desecrated churches*, by devastated fields, by the mutilated bodies of women and children.....Strange forms of disease which the chroniclers of those times sum up in the names of "black death," or plague, were born of hunger and overleapt the highest barriers.....and ran riot within the overcrowded cities.<sup>2</sup>

In the wars of Burgundy and France in the fifteenth century Catholics habitually plundered Catholic churches. At the siege of Saint-Denis in 1411 "the Germans, the Bretons, and the Gascons promised themselves the pillage of the church and the treasures of the abbey."<sup>3</sup> Later "the English, the Picards, and the Parisians.....entered the

<sup>1</sup> "Slay all! God will know his own!"

<sup>2</sup> Rev. W. Denton, *England in the Fifteenth Century*, 1888, pp. 81-82.

<sup>3</sup> Barante, *Histoire des ducs de Bourgogne*, ed. 7ième, iii, 234.

monastery.....pillaged the apartments of the inmates, and carried away the cups, the utensils, all the furniture."<sup>1</sup> At Soissons, in 1414,

the Germans, the Bretons, and the Gascons were as so many wild beasts. The Comte d'Armagnac himself could not restrain them. After having pillaged the houses they set upon the convents and the churches, where the women had taken refuge. They could not escape the brutality of the men of war; the holy ornaments, the reliquaries, all was seized without respect; the *hostia*, the bones of the martyr, trodden under foot. Never had an army of Christians, commanded by such great signors and formed of so many noble chevaliers, committed such horrors within the memory of man.<sup>2</sup>

The historian is quite mistaken; the same horrors had been many times enacted, and even on a greater scale. At the sack of Constantinople by the Christian crusaders in 1204,

the three Western bishops had strictly charged the crusaders to respect the churches and the persons of the clergy, the monks, and the nuns. They were talking to the winds. In the frantic excitement of victory all restraint was flung aside, and the warriors of the cross abandoned themselves with ferocious greed to their insatiable and filthy lewdness. With disgusting gestures and in shameless attire an abandoned woman screamed out a drunken song from the patriarchal chair in the church of Sancta Sophia.....Wretches blind with fury drained off draughts of wine from the vessels of the altar; the table of oblation, famed for its exquisite and costly workmanship, was shattered; the splendid pulpit with its silver ornaments utterly defaced. *Mules and horses were driven into the churches*<sup>3</sup> to bear

<sup>1</sup> *Id. ib.* p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> *Id. id.* p. 416.

<sup>3</sup> This detail, from Niketas, is also given by Gibbon, ch. lx, near

away the sacred treasures ; if they fell they were lashed and goaded till their blood streamed upon the pavement. While the savages were employed upon these appropriate tasks, the more devout were busy in ransacking the receptacles of holy relics and laying up a goodly store of wonder-working bones or teeth to be carried away to the churches of the great cities on the Rhine, the Loire, or the Seine.<sup>1</sup>

Savonarola was simply predicting for Rome, perhaps with his eye on the Turks, such a fate as befell Constantinople at Christian hands, regarding both as acts of divine vengeance, and expecting the capture of Rome to come soon. He pointed to the French invasion—he well might—as showing what was likely to happen.<sup>2</sup> The practice of church desecration had never ceased in Christendom for a single generation. In 1315 Edward Bruce, in his raid in Ireland, is reported to have burned churches and abbeys with all the people in them, and to have wrecked and defaced other churches, with their tombs and monuments. During the centuries between the battle of Bannockburn and the union of the English and Scottish crowns, churches, cathedrals, or abbeys were plundered or burned on both sides in nearly every great border raid. Frenchmen and Burgundians wrecked each other's churches. In his thirteenth chapter Philip de Commines tells "Of the storming, taking, and

end, and by Michaud, *Hist. des Croisades*, iii (1817), 154–55. Mills omits it. Michaud, like Cantù, stresses the point of *ordure*. So does Fleury, *Hist. écclès*, xvi, 149.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Sir G. W. Cox, *The Crusades*, 8th ed. p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> Perrens, ii, 95.



plundering the city of Liège; together with the ruin and destruction of the very churches." The Duke of Burgundy set a battalion of his guards to defend them, and killed one soldier of those who tried to enter; but later the soldiers forced an entrance, and all were completely plundered. "I myself," says Commynes, "was in none but the great church, but I was told so, and saw the marks of it, for which a long time after the Pope excommunicated all such as had any goods belonging to the churches in that city unless they restored them; and the duke appointed certain officers to go up and down his country to see the Pope's sentence put in execution."<sup>1</sup> As late as 1524, in the course of the campaign of Henry VIII in France, two churches were held and defended as fortresses on the French side, and captured by the invaders;<sup>2</sup> and in 1487 Perugia "became a beleaguered fortress under the absolute despotism of the Baglioni, *who used even the cathedrals as barracks.*"<sup>3</sup> Savonarola could not have missed hearing of that.

If there was anything astonishing for Italians in the desecration of churches at the sack of Rome, they must have had short memories. The conspiracy of the Pazzi in 1478, in which Giuliano de' Medici was slain during high mass in the cathedral church of Florence, had been backed by the Pope; and the sacrilege of the planned deed was reckoned so horrible that one of the first appointed assassins,

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Philip de Commynes*, Bohn trans. i, 158.

<sup>2</sup> Hall's Chronicle, Hen. VIII, ed. 1550, fol. 112.

<sup>3</sup> Burckhardt, *Renaissance in Italy*, Eng. tr. ed. 1892, p. 29.

who blenched at it, had to be replaced by priests, who had transcended such scruples.<sup>1</sup> On the capture of Brescia by the French under Gaston de Foix in 1512, "things sacred and profane, the goods, the honour, and the life of the inhabitants were for seven days delivered up to the greed, the lust, and the cruelty of the soldier," only the nuns being spared.<sup>2</sup> In 1526 the Milanese told the Constable Bourbon, the general of their ally :---

Frederick Barbarossa anciently desolated this city; his vengeance spared neither the inhabitants, nor the edifices, nor the walls; but that was nothing in comparison with the evils we now suffer. The barbarism of an enemy is less insupportable than the unjust cruelty of a friend.....our miseries have endured more than a month; they increase every hour; and, like the damned, we suffer, without hope, evils which before this time of calamity we believed to be beyond human endurance.<sup>3</sup>

Guicciardini testifies that the Spaniards of the emperor's forces had been more cruel than the Germans,<sup>4</sup> violating the women and reducing to rags the men of their own allies.

<sup>1</sup> Perrens, *Hist. de Florence, 1434-1531*, i, 385.

<sup>2</sup> Guicciardini, lib. x, c. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* xvii, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Though in reporting the sack of Rome he makes the Germans behave the more brutally as regards the cardinals.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE LOGIA THEORY AND THE HISTORICAL TEXT

So much for the “especially remarkable” fact that churches were desecrated in the sack of Rome in 1527, and that Savonarola should in 1496 have predicted such things for his own day. We have seen that his prediction was not a forecast of the event, that he had no idea of the causation of the ultimate sack of Rome, that he really prophesied an early event, and that he was simply announcing speedy divine vengeance after the manner of the Hebrew and many previous Christian prophets. What ground for argument, then, does his case furnish for an inference as to the date of the quasi-prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem in the third Gospel? Blass, despite his “especially remarkable” argument, puts his case pretty low:—

Accidentally, you will say, the event [in 1527] corresponded with the prophecy. But that is not my point, whether it was accidental, or the prophet had really foreseen the event; for in the case of the prophecies recorded by Luke you may raise the same controversy if you like.<sup>1</sup>

What then were the manner and the matter of the

<sup>1</sup> *Philology of the Gospels*, p. 41.

prophecy in Luke? The Messiah expressly grounds his prediction upon the non-acceptance by Jerusalem of him and his mission :—

If thou [Jerusalem] hadst only known in this day the things which belong unto peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee when thine enemies *shall cast up a bank about thee*, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall dash thee to the ground, and thy children within thee; and *they shall not leave in thee one stone on another* (Luke xix, 42-44).

But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand. Then let them that are in Judæa flee unto the mountains.....For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. ....And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all the nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And there shall be signs in sun and moon and stars..... And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh (*id.* xxi, 20-28).

“I do not think,” says Blass, “that either the former or the latter of these foretellings is very distinct, since there are neither names given nor peculiar circumstances indicated; only the common order of events is described.....” That will certainly not hold in respect of the “shall not leave in thee one stone on another,” or the “cast up a bank about thee,” which is a distinct specification of the Roman siege method of 70.



But let us follow up the implication, which is that a Jewish vaticinator, mindful of Daniel, might about the year 30 so predict the events of the year 70, and a world of other events which never happened, without astonishing us more than does Savonarola.

As we shall see, not only the circumstantial details but the remainder of the prediction completely exclude the idea of fortuitous real vaticination, even if it be argued that prophecies of quite visionary prodigies may conceivably have been made at any date. As to the prophecy of the fall of the temple, which is common to the three synoptics, the Professor leaves it "out of the present discussion," seeing that the liberal theologians are willing to let it stand as a prophecy *ante eventum*. Certainly he may well condemn such a critical method. The prophecy as to the temple, and that in Matthew (xxiv, 3-31) and Mark (xiii, 3-27) as to the sequence of war, persecution, dissension, false prophets, evangelization of the whole world, the abomination of desolation in the holy place, false Christs (twice specified), signs and wonders, and the final cosmic catastrophe—all this is certainly on all fours, critically considered, with the presages in Luke. But how shall rational criticism be induced to take the whole mass of quasi-vaticination as the utterance of a wandering thaumaturg of the year 30? It is idle for Professor Blass to explain to us that when Luke makes Jesus say "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles," with mere reminiscence of the Septuagint Daniel, and Matthew

and Mark make him speak with exact reference to Sept. Dan. ix, end, they are citing independently from their original. Their original may just have been the cited passage in Daniel, with no intervening document. "It is self-evident," says the Professor,<sup>1</sup> "that the real speech of Christ *must* have been longer than we read it now in any Gospel." That thesis cannot be self-evident of which the subject invites and admits a wholly different explanation; and the "must" is a sample of the Professor's critical ethic.

Similarly Dr. Petrie assumes that there were any number of logia current, all genuine, and that the gospel-makers simply cite from them wherever they are found appropriate to the circumstances of the moment. "These episodes, thus brought into prominence by the conditions of the time, were therefore incorporated in the Nucleus, or in the gospels which grew upon that."<sup>2</sup> It now behoves us to consider that interesting development of traditionalist theory.

The Nucleus, be it explained, is Dr. Petrie's substitute for the Primitive Gospel of the school of B. Weiss, and is constructed by the simple and certainly quite objective process of selecting "everything that is common to all three synoptics in a parallel text"—that is, occurring in all three in the same order. This is the "structural" test, and it yields a document which does not, like the Weiss selection, end before the Last Supper, but goes on

<sup>1</sup> As cited, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Work cited, p. 34.

to the Resurrection. But this Nucleus, be it noted, was practically complete almost immediately after the Founder's death. The close "suggests a document drawn up within a few months of the final events."<sup>1</sup> How, then, Dr. Petrie can speak of logia incorporated in the Nucleus in respect of the conditions of the time, is not very clear. By his account the prevalent Christian idea about the year 30, *during the Ministry*, "was the proper understanding of the law, which was not yet abrogated in any particular." At this stage, accordingly, the Sermon on the Mount would be the prominent logion. "And when we notice how the fulfilling of the law is the main theme of the nucleus, and how little [even] of the completed Gospels refer to the Gentile problems, we must see how devoid of historic sense is the anachronism of supposing the main body of the Gospels to have originated as late as the Gentile period"<sup>2</sup> [*i.e.* 60-70!]. But in 40-50, with the spread of the Church, as set forth in the Acts, "the Samaritans were welcomed, and Gentile proselytes such as the centurion Cornelius"; whereupon the suitable logia would be added to the Gospels current. Then in 50-60, when the Gentiles began to enter in decisive numbers, there was "a special meaning in the parable of the Prodigal Son, and in the subjection to kings and rulers"; hence further embodiments. Then, after the fall of Jerusalem in 70, "Christianity lost its sense of any tie to Judaism."

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 38.

It will be admitted that this is a stirring change from the run of New Testament criticism of the past seventy years. That criticism more or less unconsciously recognized the problem set up by the entire ignorance of gospel teaching revealed in the Pauline and other epistles. Dr. Petrie, following Professor Blass in an unhesitating acceptance of the narrative of the Acts, simply ignores the Pauline problem altogether. He boldly credits the Church with a Gospel before Paul's conversion, and, like other traditionalists, supplies Paul, the gospel-less, with a physician, Luke, who had collected from the scattered mass of logia more gospel than anybody else!

Thus has the pendulum swung back to the furthest extreme from that at which men carried down the Gospel dates to accommodate the data. As to chronology, Dr. Petrie is practically at the orthodox standpoint of Professor Salmon.<sup>1</sup> An objective and ostensibly scientific method, involving no element of personal bias or preference, is employed to make a selection from the Gospels which shall present as it were mathematically or statistically the earliest elements in the synoptics. On that selection, however, there is brought to bear no further critical principle whatever. It is assumed that it *must* all come from the traditional founder, a mass of whose utterances *must* have been committed by auditors to writing as they were delivered (the power to write being held to be common in

<sup>1</sup> *Histor. Introd. to the N. T.*, 4th ed. 1889, p. 111.



Galilee and Judea in the first century because it was common in Egypt in the third); and a nucleus collection of these separate documents *must* have been made soon after the crucifixion, and there and then wound up. At any rate, such a collection is yielded by selecting the groups or blocks of matter which occur in all three synoptics in the same order; and this *must* have been made about the year 30, because it is mainly occupied with the problems of the law, and very little with "the Gentile problems" which so soon began to come to the front. The history of the Acts is here taken as unassailable ground, like the main Gospel record.

Two comments here at once suggest themselves. Dr. Petrie's line of construction might with perfect congruity be employed to yield evidence that the assumed original *Teacher* was mainly concerned with problems of the law; and (2) the inferred multitude of original floating dicta may with immense gain in plausibility be transmuted into a series of interpolations made by different hands long after the supposed Founder's death. For what critical right has Dr. Petrie to subsume a store of floating Jesuine dicta which supplied the Church, in its changing circumstances, for three or four decades, with suitable parables and teachings to meet every new problem? If you profess to seek a strictly impersonal principle of selection, why not apply a strictly impersonal principle of inference from the result?

Obviously the additional logia are far more likely to have been invented than found. Such a chronic

windfall of papyri is a sufficiently fantastic hypothesis on the face of it, in no way justifiable from the recent discovery of a few enigmatic scraps that had not been embodied, and suggest no community of thought with those embodied. But even if we allow the probable existence of many floating leaves, where is the likelihood that their sayings all came from the same Teacher? In the terms of the hypothesis, he occupied himself mainly with the law (unless the lost logia outbulk the saved), while at the same time he duly provided for the Samaritans and the Gentiles! His disciples and apostles, nonetheless, paid no attention to these latter provisions until they found that such provisions were really necessary to accommodate the thronging converts! All this is very awkwardly suggestive of the Moslem saying that the Khalif Omar "was many a time of a certain opinion, and the Koran was revealed accordingly."<sup>1</sup> It would indeed have been a remarkable experience for the evangelist to discover the logion (Mt. xvi, 17-19) as to the founding of the Church on the rock of Peter when a Petrine claim had to be substantiated. To the eye of Dr. Rendel Harris, an orthodox but a candid scholar, the "rock" text suggests an adaptation of a passage in the ODES OF SOLOMON in which God's "rock" is the foundation not of the Church but of the Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> Such probabilities Dr. Petrie never considers.

Let us see how Dr. Petrie's method explains

<sup>1</sup> Nöldeke, *Sketches from Eastern History*, 1892, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon*, ed. Rendel Harris, 1909, pp. 74, 118.

Matthew x, 5: "Go not into any way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the Samaritans." It occurs only in Matthew: Luke gives the parable of the Good Samaritan, with its flings at the lawyer and at the Jews in general; and in John the Founder makes Samaritan converts. The anti-Gentile text Dr. Petrie never discusses! Yet his method does not permit him to exclude it. It belongs to his "sixth class," of "sayings and episodes which only occur in one Gospel. These classes are almost entirely in Matthew and Luke, and are *the accretions which were added after the Gospels had finally parted company.*"<sup>1</sup> So that after the Gentile period had set in, Matthew, the one "professional scribe among the apostles," somehow found a *logion Iesou* which suited the need of the Church to exclude Samaritans and Gentiles, while Luke found another which suited the need to welcome them. And yet, in respect of its very purport, the anti-Gentile and anti-Samaritan teaching ought, if genuine, to belong, on Dr. Petrie's general principle, to the earliest collection of all. Such is the dilemma to which we are led by the strictly statistical method of selection, conducted without any higher light.

<sup>1</sup> Work cited, p. 49.

## CHAPTER XII

### FAILURE OF THE LOGIA THEORY

To the open-minded reader it must be already plain that, unless we are to be led into mere chaos, there must at once be added to the statistical test either the proviso that given sayings may for the purposes of certain sections of the Church have been *left out* in certain Gospels, or that for the purposes of certain sections they may have been invented. And the moment such a concession is made, the primary assumption of necessary authenticity is destroyed. If the anti-Samaritan precept is the utterance of the Founder, the pro-Samaritan parable is not; or else the Founder was literally all things to all men. If either could be foisted on a gospel, anything could be; and the futile historical argument to save the prediction of the fall of Jerusalem—an argument proceeding, as we have seen, on a quite uncritical view of one uninvestigated and loosely described case—becomes doubly irrelevant. Dr. Petrie's Nucleus of triple tradition contains the prophecy:—

The Son of Man shall be *betrayed* unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles *to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him; and the third day he shall rise again.*

Is *that* to be salved as historical, on the pretext



that Blass has by the case of Savonarola "exploded the dogma" of *omne vaticinium post eventum*, or is to be salved by the plea that Savonarola, like Lincoln, predicted his own death at the hands of his enemies? And if prudence perforce abandons that course, why was the vaguer prophecy about Jerusalem sought to be salved at all? Why was not the miracle prediction included in the Savonarola argument? Considered as a whole, the other is not at all a bare prediction of the sacking of a city, fortuitously fulfilled forty years after utterance: it is a Messianic judgment, carrying a whole eschatology bound up with it.<sup>1</sup> And the fact that different gospels give it differently is not to be rationally explained by Professor Blass's device of saying that Jesus *must* have said a great deal more still, and that Luke selected what would appeal to Gentiles, while Matthew and Mark omitted what would give pain to Jews. This conception of evangelists playing fast and loose with the known divine oracles to suit men's susceptibilities ought to be disturbing to any believer's moral sense; while that of a set of propagandists inventing oracles to suit their own religious aim puts the Gospel-makers in a line with the whole succession of Jewish and early Christian framers of supposititious documents, as men of their age, well-meaning, narrow, deluded, devoted.

<sup>1</sup> Bousset (*The Anti-Christ Legend*, Eng. tr. p. 23) "assumes, with many recent expositors, that the *distinctly apocalyptic part* of Matt. xxiv and Mark xiii is a fragment of foreign origin introduced amid genuine utterances of the Lord. It is also evident that, compared with that of Mark, the text of Matthew is the original." Here we have the old strategy of compromise.

We have come back to the fundamental issue between authoritarian supernaturalism and free reason. If the prediction of the betrayal, the trial, the scourging, the mocking, the crucifixion, and the resurrection is to stand, there need be no more discussion over miracles or anything else. "It is written," and there an end. Biblical criticism has once more become blasphemy. If reason is to have any access to the matter, the prediction must fall as a fiction; and if the "exploded" argument from Savonarola is to be revived, it will have to be restricted to the case of the prediction to which it was so prudentially applied. But if one hopeless prophecy is to be dropped as *post eventum*, it is mere irrelevance to debate over another which is only in one selected and isolated aspect less hopeless, while as a whole it is equally so.

Savonarola's prediction of the fall of Rome was one of many, motivated by religion and invited by the absolute fact of previous invasions, of which the last had occurred only two years before. The one concrete detail in which it was "fulfilled" was simply a specification of a common feature in the warfare of the age. Another invasion of Italy was believed to be imminent, *and actually took place in the year of the prophecy*, without fulfilling that in any detail. The Gospel prophecy is Messianic, devoid of political motivation, accompanied by a whole apparatus of Christian eschatology, and backed by other predictions of pure miracle. The details of the siege and the sequel are as plainly supplied after the event as those of the betrayal, the mockery, the scourging,

the crucifixion, and the resurrection. To hold by one set of predictions and abandon the other is mere critical trifling. Even orthodox critics give up the early chapters of Luke as late accretions. What kind of credit is it that is to be saved by making him the faithful chronicler of a real prophecy?

The prediction of the fall of the temple, which is in the Nucleus as being common in matter and order to all three synoptics, is in no better case. On Dr. Petrie's principle, it is one of the earliest accepted sayings—that is, it was embodied when the Jesuist movement was pre-occupied over the law, and yet it did not disturb that pre-occupation. On his theory, it should not have appeared in the Nucleus at all, or in any Gospel until the occasion arose. Thus incompatible with Dr. Petrie's own theory, it is equally incompatible with any critical principle. This is a concrete Messianic prophecy, not to be salved by any juggling with mere historiography. In the terms of the case, it was made at a time when there was no politically visible reason for making it,<sup>1</sup> and is not in the least to be explained as were the vaticinations of Savonarola. On the principles of Professor Blass, it ought to have been far too "painful" for preservation by men adhering to the Jewish law.

It is quite thinkable, of course, that the compilers

<sup>1</sup> The assertion of Dr. Conybeare (*Myth, Magic, and Morals*, p. 46), that the destruction of the temple was "an event which *any* clear-sighted observer of the growing hostility between Jew and Roman *must* have foreseen," is characteristic of that writer's way of interpreting documents. A second reading may perhaps yield him another impression. Forty years of non-fulfilment is a precious proof of the "must."

of the Gospels may have found such quasi-predictions already committed to writing, and merely embodied them. But that admission only carries us back to the problem of authenticity. If any current "scrap of paper" concerning "Jesus" or "the Lord" could thus secure canonicity, what trust is to be put in the canon? It is recorded in the history of Islam that Abu Daoud, who collected some half-a-million traditions concerning Mohammed, rejected all but 4,800, which included "the authentic, those which *seem* to be authentic, and those which are *nearly* so."<sup>1</sup> This again, it may be argued, proves that false traditions do not negate the historicity of the personage they concern. And that is clearly true. There may conceivably have been a Teacher in whose mouth many invented sayings were put even in his lifetime. But when we thus come to the historicity problem, there is simply no such basis in the Gospels as we have in the life of the confessedly "Illiterate Prophet." The Gospel life begins and ends in miracle, and it yields no intelligible evangel apart from that ostensibly founded on the sacrificial death—the death, that is, of the God.

Apart from the sacramental rite, the whole body of the Teaching is but a mass of incompatibilities, telling of a dozen standpoints, legalism and anti-legalism, Judaism and Gentilism, Davidism and non-Davidism, asceticism and the contrary, a meek Messiah and one claiming to be greater than Solomon,

<sup>1</sup> Muir and Weir, *Life of Mohammed*, ed. 1912, p. xlii.



a Teacher vetoing invective and one freely indulging in it, a popular and unexplained Gospel for the masses who are declared to be purposely excluded from comprehension of that very Gospel, whereof the esoteric explanations yield nothing that could apply to the alleged propaganda.

Even self-contradictions, it may be argued, do not negate the authenticity of a teaching. Carlyle and Ruskin abound in them; who escapes them? Many passages in the Koran are contradicted or abrogated by others, 225 verses being cancelled by later ones.<sup>1</sup> Here indeed there is plain ground for critical doubt; and some of us must emphatically decline to accept Muir's verdict, endorsing Von Hammer's, that "we may upon the strongest presumption affirm that every verse in the Koran is the genuine and unaltered composition of Mohammed himself."<sup>2</sup> But even if we are satisfied that Mohammed in his long life deliberately modified his doctrine, there is no room for such an explanation in the case of a teacher who is never once said to avow modification, and whose whole teaching career ostensibly covers but a year in the synoptic record.

As the tradition stands, whether read with Unitarian or with Trinitarian assumptions, it is a mere mosaic of enigma and contradiction. If the Teacher never called himself the Son of God in a

<sup>1</sup> Muir and Weir, as cited, p. xxvi.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. xxviii. Contrast the pronouncements of Palmer, Kuenen, and Nicholson, cited in the author's *History of Freethought*, 3rd ed. i, 250.

miraculous sense, how came the men for whom his word was law, and who in the terms of the thesis knew his life history and parentage if any one did, to call him so? In Dr. Petrie's Nucleus, the triple tradition, the Founder does assure his disciples that "in the regeneration" he will sit in the throne of glory, and they on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes. What room is there for Gentilism here? And if downright miracle and miraculous prediction alike be given up as unhistorical, on what grounds can we give credence to *this* as a really delivered oracle?

On the other hand, no fundamental difficulty remains when we recognize that the whole Gospel record is the composite result of a process of making a life history for a God. The command of the Messiah to Peter to keep silence as to his Messianic character is quite intelligible as providing at once the claim by Jesus and an explanation of the fact that no such Messianic movement was historically recorded. The blank enigma of the early "popular" evangel is solved when we realize that there had been no such evangel; that the cult had really grown out of the ancient sacramental rite; that the growing movement had to evolve a quasi-biography when the God of the rite was to be developed into a Messiah; and that the Judaism of the old Messianic idea had to be transmuted into universalism when the cult came to a Gentile growth. All the contradictory texts fall (more or less clearly) into their orders as survivals of the divergent sects formed by the changing situation—or, let us say,

of those changing needs of the widening cult which Dr. Petrie so arbitrarily makes a ground for the mere *selection* of dicta from a floating mass of written notes, but which may so much more rationally be taken as grounds for *producing* the required oracle.

That there were such scattered and floating oracles, indeed, we are not critically entitled to deny. The Judæo-Greek world was indeed familiar with oracles of "the Lord." The Gospel Jesus is made to predict that there would come after him many saying "I am Christ"; and while the traditionalist must accept this as true prediction, the historian must pronounce that various "Christs" or quasi-Christs did come. We have some of their names and their brief secular history.<sup>1</sup> Each of these men would be "the Lord" for his followers; and some of them, surely, propounded some teaching. The Gospel ethic of reciprocity, we know, was put in a saner form by Hillel; did he get it from the Jesuists? Christian scholars do not claim as much.<sup>2</sup> There is no Messianic item in the Gospels, apart from the lore of the sacrament, which may not have been in the legend of any "Christ." As it happens, the best authenticated saying of "the Lord" is one which no Christian now accepts—the fantastic millenarian prediction given by Papias, who had it from "the elders who saw John, the

<sup>1</sup> Josephus, *Antiq.* xx, 5, § 1; *Bel. Jud.*, vii, 11; Dio Cassius, lxi; Orosius, vii, 12.

<sup>2</sup> *E.g.* the orthodox Ewald, *Geschichte Christus' und seiner Zeit*, 3te Ausg. p. 31 note.

disciple of the Lord," and textually quoted by Irenæus, who is practically corroborated by Eusebius. The latter, it is true, pronounces Papias very limited in his comprehension;<sup>1</sup> but has not the same thing been said many times of the disciples by believers in the gospel Jesus?

The logion preserved from Papias, we know, is in the APOCALYPSE OF BARUCH, which imitated the BOOK OF ENOCH, both of which are full of oracles of "the Lord." But this only proves that oracles passing current in other quarters and of another source could pass current with devout Jesuists as oracles of Jesus. The APOCALYPSE OF BARUCH is pronounced by Canon Charles, who has so ably edited that and other remains of Jewish literature of the same age, a "beautiful" book, "almost the last noble utterance of Judaism before it plunged in the dark and oppressive years that followed the destruction of Jerusalem"; a book written when "breathing thought and burning word had still their home in Palestine, and the hand of the Jewish artist was still master of its ancient cunning."<sup>2</sup> It was admittedly long more widely current in Christian than in Jewish circles, and fell into discredit only when it was felt to contain "an implicit polemic against Christianity." It is to its early Christian vogue that we owe its preservation in a Syriac translation made from the Greek: "of the Hebrew

<sup>1</sup> "Stupidity" is ascribed to him by Blass (*Entstehung*, p. 8), who on his own principles has no right whatever to reject such a "tradition."

<sup>2</sup> Compare with this avowal of an orthodox scholar, Mill's assumption of the total absence of genius in Palestine apart from Jesus.



original every line has perished, save a few still surviving in rabbinic writings."

Who can say how many other such Jewish books may not have furnished items for the compilers of the Gospels? The Sermon on the Mount we know is a Judaic compilation; and the "Slavonic ENOCH" contains sets of beatitudes closely analogous to those of the Sermon. To the traditionalist these things are matters of profound perplexity; for the rational critic they are evidences for the naturalist conception of the rise of Christianity.

## CHAPTER XIII

### RESURGENCE OF THE HISTORICAL PROBLEM

WHEN the "selection" theory is applied to the *logia* actually recovered at Oxyrhynchus it conspicuously fails to square these with the traditionalist assumption. On Dr. Petrie's principle they were left out of the Nucleus and Gospels alike because they met *no* need of the Christian organization. That is to say, oracles of the Son of God were simply ignored by the apostles and the organizers because they did not serve any useful purpose. Independent criticism finds in them plain marks of Judaism, of Gnosticism, of Christian heresy, and of a Christism irreconcilable with the Gospel record.<sup>1</sup> Logion iv, iii, *a*, runs: "I stood in the midst of the world, and in flesh I was seen of them; and I found all drunken, and none found I athirst among them" [*sc.* for the word]—the saying of a retrospective<sup>2</sup> Christ, no longer in the flesh, such as we find in the Gnostic PISTIS SOPHIA and the ODES OF SOLOMON.<sup>2</sup> On the traditionalist view this at least

<sup>1</sup> See the collection of opinions in Dr. Charles Taylor's *The Oxyrhynchus Logia and the Apocryphal Gospels*, 1899, pp. 15-19, 23, 24, 25, 27, 39, 42, etc.

<sup>2</sup> These logia, it should be noted, are always ascribed to "Iēs." The full name *Iesous* is never given, and there is no cognomen.

must be tolerably late ; what then does the "selection" argument gain from the recovered papyri ?

But it fares no better when confronted with the opening chapters of Luke. For the Blass school these are to be dated 50-60. Already Luke's "many"<sup>1</sup> had drawn up their narratives ; and these, we are to suppose, included the miracle story of the birth of John, the Annunciation, the kinship and intercourse of Elizabeth and Mary, the preparation of John "in the desert," a different account of the birth at Bethlehem, the appearance of the Divine Child in the Temple, and all the rest of it ; but no mention of the flight into Egypt. We are asked to believe that all these added narratives were current among the faithful "from the first," but that Mark and Matthew did not see fit to include them in their Gospels, though Matthew saw reason to tell of the flight into Egypt, and Luke to suppress it. Whatever may be the outcome of the "liberal" method of handling the Gospels, it is safe to say that this will never appease the critical spirit. The "gospel of the Infancy" thus embodied in Luke is visibly cognate with the "apocryphal" gospels which were never allowed into the canon, but were more or less popular in the Church. A compromise between traditionalism and the statistical method may set up the position that the stories were current from the first, although all fictitious ; but this involves the awkward consequence that the whole atmosphere "from the first"

<sup>1</sup> "Many," says Blass (*Entstehung*, p. 11), may mean 3, 4, 5, or even more.

is one of unrestrained invention. Would the inventors of all these myths have any scruple about putting in the mouth of "the Lord" any medley of teachings collected from the present and the past?

Luke inserts the episode of the mission of the seventy, with the usual lack of time measurement, between the mission of the twelve and the decisive visit to Jerusalem. In this narrative, the twelve bring back no message, merely reporting "what things they had done." Their mission is in effect made of no account: we read of more miracles, predictions of the approaching tragedy, the Transfiguration, and a series of episodes disparaging the disciples; and then we come upon the mission of the seventy, who are "sent two and two before his face into every city and place whither he himself was about to come." To the seventy is now ascribed the joyful report which the Weiss school calmly assign to the Primitive Gospel, and ascribe to the returning twelve, though Matthew and Mark have no mention of it. Thus Luke is in effect represented as connecting with a new mission story a result which he found connected in the primitive story with the mission of the twelve, while Matthew and Mark had seen fit to suppress the result altogether.

What gain in credibility, then, is effected by substituting the "selection" theory for one in which the third evangelist is implicitly represented as a framer of fiction? For Dr. Petrie, the story of the seventy is a logion ignored by the first two Gospel-makers, presumably as serving no purpose, albeit



one of the most important items in the history. What kind of narrators, then, were the men who passed it over? The alternatives are equally destructive to credence: on either view we are dealing with men who would invent anything or suppress anything. And yet the subject of the missions lies at the core of the historical problem. To the eye of rational criticism it is an evolving legend. If we take Mark as the first selector or collector, we have the twelve sent forth "by two and two" without money or supplies; with authority over unclean spirits; and with no specified message whatever, though the twelve are to make a solemn and minatory testimony against those who refuse to hear them. "And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them." They make no report.

In Matthew, similarly, the twelve are empowered to cast out spirits and heal diseases, and are "sent forth" with a peremptory veto on any visit to Samaritans or Gentiles, to "preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils: *freely ye received, freely give.*" As in Mark, they are to go unfurnished; and are to withhold their peace from the unworthy, testifying as aforesaid. Then ensues a long discourse, with no explanation of the kingdom of heaven, though the missionaries are to "proclaim upon the housetops" what they "hear in the ear." Then, "when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, *he departed thence*

to teach and preach in their cities." Of the mission there is not another word: the disciples are not even mentioned as returning.

Upon this kind of basis Luke erects a new structure. The twelve are sent forth to exorcise, heal, and preach, unfurnished; and as before they are to give testimony against those who will not receive them. "And they departed, and went throughout the villages, preaching *the Gospel*, and healing everywhere." "And the apostles, when they were returned, declared unto him what things they had done." The story is not suppressed, and it is supplied with a conclusion; but it is on the mission of the seventy that stress is visibly laid: they "return with joy," and are told to rejoice that their names are written in heaven. "In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit"; and after the discourse on the Father and the Son<sup>1</sup> the disciples are "privately" told that many prophets and kings had desired in vain to see and hear what they had seen and heard.

In face of all this the methods of the Bernhard Weiss school and the selection theory are alike invalid. They furnish no explanation. The third Gospel is simply substituting a mission to the Gentiles for a mission to the Jews, under cover of a story of a preparatory mission to all the places that were to be visited by the Teacher on his way to his death at Jerusalem. The seventy—in some MSS. seventy-two—stand for the seventy or seventy-

<sup>1</sup> Codices A and C preface *this* with "And turning to his disciples, he said."

two peoples into whom, by Jewish tradition, mankind was divided. The notion that a genuine logion of this kind was all along lying ready to be used is surely fantastic. It is a planned myth, eking out the main myth. It yields only the same Gospel of one phrase, not meant to be understood by the hearers. But it carries in symbol a provision for the Gentiles; and immediately upon it there follows the story of the Good Samaritan, demonstrating that the real tie among men is not nationality but humanity, and impeaching the fanaticism and hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders.

Facing once more the sharp antithesis between this and the strictly Judaic command in Matthew, we dismiss as a futility the notion that the same teacher delivered both about the same time, and that the pro-Gentile compiler merely "selected" one and dropped the other. The two sayings are framed for two schools or two sects; and it is idle to see history in either. *If* the deified Teacher had delivered the first, the second would have been a daring blasphemy. They are alike but men's counsels ascribed to "the Lord." To this conclusion we are always driven. The starting-point of the diverging sects must be looked for in something else than a body of oracular teaching of any kind.

## CHAPTER XIV

### ORTHODOXY AND THE "ORAL" HYPOTHESIS

THE diverging schools of documentary "construction" being thus alike unable to yield a coherent notion either of the process of Gospel-making or of the beginnings of the cultus, it is not surprising to find yet a third school of scholarly interpretation undertaking to do better, and to build on an "oral" basis where others have vainly built on documents. This theory, long ago predominant in Germany,<sup>1</sup> is latterly represented in England by the Rev. Arthur Wright, author of *THE COMPOSITION OF THE GOSPELS*, a *SYNOPSIS OF THE GOSPELS*, and *SOME NEW TESTAMENT PROBLEMS*.

Writing before the appearance of Dr. Petrie's treatise, Mr. Wright did not contemplate that development of the later school which gives the earliest possible dates for the Gospels; but we may feel sure that he would give it small quarter. Himself essentially orthodox, and making without question all the primary assumptions of historicity, he dates the Epistle of James before the year 50, Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians in the year 52; Mark

<sup>1</sup> Strauss speaks of it as having been "firmly established." *Das Leben Jesu*, Einl. § 9, end.



about 70; Matthew "not much" later; Luke in 80; and John later still.<sup>1</sup> He is not tied to the synoptics: when they become unmanageable he vigorously rectifies them by the aid of the Fourth Gospel. But on his own lines he is so candid that he can always be read with pleasure; and his arguments are well worth consideration.

Mr. Wright's theory, in brief, is that the Gospels, one and all, represent the late consignment to paper of matter preserved from the first in the Christian catechetical schools, given by the apostles and preserved by their pupils in the Rabbinical fashion. As Matthew divides plausibly into fifty-one lessons, and Mark in the Westcott and Hort text into forty-eight paragraphs, it is suggested that the plan in both cases had been to attain to a set of fifty-one or fifty-two; and

If there really was an attempt to provide every Sunday with a Gospel of its own, we shall understand why the formation of Gospel sections proceeded rapidly at first and then ceased; we shall understand why all our Gospels are so short and contain so little which is not essential; we shall understand how S. Mark's order became fixed.<sup>2</sup>

This plausible but dangerous detail, however, is not insisted on; what is essential is the datum of long oral tradition. Orthodox as he is, too, Mr. Wright holds that Luke i; ii; iii, 23-38, "are comparatively late additions, which never formed part of the primitive oral teaching."<sup>2</sup> Thus he can summarily get rid of a number of incredibilities which

<sup>1</sup> *Some New Testament Problems*, 1898, pp. 197-98.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 15.

the other schools more prudently leave to be excised by the reader as he sees fit. But we shall find him making a stout fight for many others.

On the "oral" theory every Church had its own tradition,<sup>1</sup> "differing both in contents and wording from that of other Churches, and in particular exhibiting much mixture and *many sayings of Christ which are not in our Gospels at all*"<sup>2</sup>—an interesting approximation, in effect, to the theory of scattered leaflets. Thus is to be accounted for the endless variety in Gospel phrasing and detail. For Mr. Wright, further, it is inconceivable that any evangelist left out anything he knew of. "The common idea" (before Dr. Petrie) "that they picked and selected what was specially adapted to their readers, I most confidently reject."<sup>3</sup> Matthew would gladly have given the parable of the Prodigal Son, and Luke the story of the Syrophenician woman, which would so well have suited his purpose.<sup>4</sup> "He did not give it because he had never heard of it." Thus, in brief, Mr. Wright posits much teaching lost even from the oral tradition, as Dr. Petrie posits many lost leaflets.

But Mr. Wright's conception of the oral tradition, upon scrutiny, becomes disquieting to the critical sense. In one place, discussing Luther's estimate of the Epistle of James as an epistle of straw, he

<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere (p. 200) Mr. Wright speaks of the traditions as "*circulated* in an oral form from very early times"; but he does not appear to mean this in the natural sense.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 213.

<sup>4</sup> Would it? For Loisy it is stamped with Jewish exclusiveness. The "dog" merely gets a compassionate crumb.

remarks—with a great deal more truth, I fancy, than he dreams of—that James's Epistle "is Christianity in swaddling-clothes."<sup>1</sup> Again, the opening verses of John's Gospel "reveal a depth of knowledge to which S. James never attained. Not that S. James would have contradicted them or doubted their truth. But it is one thing to see truth when it is set before you; it is another to set it forth yourself. There is such a thing as latent knowledge."<sup>2</sup> Yet on the same page with the swaddling-clothes passage Mr. Wright has said, with regard to Mark's omission of the words, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest":—

Was it humility that made him deliberately omit them as too good for so insignificant a creature as himself to record? Or was it a conscious or unconscious feeling that they were unsuited to his readers? A man with such preposterous humility was ill-equipped for the work of an evangelist. Readers so unchristian would not value a Gospel.

What now becomes of the two presentments of James and John? Both must presumably have known most that was to be known, *ex hypothesi*. Yet James has not a word of specifically Christian doctrine, and, save in two sentences, one of which has every appearance of interpolation, while the other is only less suspicious, no mention of Jesus. John, on the other hand, as an apostle (whether or not the beloved one), must on the theory have heard many of the sayings given in the synoptics, which

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 215.

he does not report. Why does he not? Had *he* never heard of the "Come unto me" allocution? Could *he* conceivably have put it aside from a preposterous humility? If he had not heard that, had he not heard the Sermon on the Mount, or any of the parable-solutions given in the synoptics as specially addressed to the twelve disciples? Can Mr. Wright, holding by the central tradition of Jesus and the twelve, believe that John had heard none of the teachings which he does not repeat? If, on the other hand, he admits wholesale suppression in John's case, what becomes of the argument above cited?

It matters little that Mr. Wright credits John with evolving the *Logos* doctrine out of his own profound meditation, and with having "remoulded" the sayings of Jesus which he does give. That is a standing device of exegesis, Unitarian and Trinitarian alike; and by his account the general oral tradition did the same thing indefinitely. But all the while Mr. Wright is going a great deal further. He alternately insists that every evangelist told all he knew, and assumes that the two evangelists who are alleged to have been apostles did not. If, he writes—

If, as becomes increasingly probable, a Johannine course of teaching was extant in comparatively early times, it is not strange that, as S. John dealt chiefly with the Judæan ministry, S. Peter should have refused to intrude into his brother Apostle's domain. *They may have agreed at the outset to divide the work thus between them.*

It is impossible to reconcile this with Mr. Wright's



theory of the inclusiveness of the evangelists. Why should not Mark do what Matthew and John did in the terms of the case?

Of course this is not the true critical solution; the immediate question is the consistency of Mr. Wright's critical principles. To the eye of unbiassed criticism the "Come unto me" logion is not a possible oracle at all; it is an unintelligently inserted liturgical formula from the mysteries, misplaced and meaningless as a public teaching.<sup>1</sup> As regards the fair historical inference from the wide difference between the synoptic Gospels and the fourth, it is not possible to accept any of Mr. Wright's solutions, tried by his own tests. To suggest that John had not "heard" of the Virgin Birth story is for him impossible, unless he post-dates that as he does the birth-stories in Luke. If he follows that course, what can he make of the 13th chapter of John, a palpable interpolation or substitution between the 12th and the 14th, which form a sequence that the 13th absolutely breaks?<sup>2</sup> If that interpolation be admitted, what exactly is left to fight for?

In any case, the implication that Matthew, the apostle, "had not heard of" what John declares to be the first miracle, or of the raising of Lazarus, is as destructive of every traditionalist assumption as is the implication that John the Apostle had not heard of the Sermon on the Mount, or of the parables of the mystery of the kingdom. Mark

<sup>1</sup> See *Christianity and Mythology*, 2nd ed. p. 388.

<sup>2</sup> The "Arise, let us go hence," at the end of ch. 14, is another interpolation which has no meaning in the context.

and Luke expressly declare that John was present at the raising of Jairus' daughter; and the fourth Gospel makes no mention of it. It was perhaps to meet cruces of this kind that Mr. Wright makes John and Peter "divide between them" the portions of the ministry; but such a device simply destroys, as we have seen, another main part of his case. Mr. Wright may well reject the thesis of Mr. Halcombe, who, severely condemning "modern criticism," produces a modern criticism of his own, which makes John's Gospel the *first*—another of the hopeless devices of traditionalist critics to escape from the imbroglio of the tradition. Mr. Halcombe gravely reasons that the best Gospel came first; and Mr. Wright pronounces that "such a plan of composition seems unworthy of God and incredible in man."<sup>1</sup> But his own theory presents only a different set of incredibilities. He accepts without a misgiving the most staggering anomalies. "If it were not for a single incidental statement in S. John" (iv, 1, 2), he writes, "we should have concluded confidently that the sacrament of holy baptism was first instituted after the Resurrection." John's statement is in fact the sole intimation that Jesus or the disciples ever baptized at all; and it is either a designed or redacted equivocal or a flat contradiction in terms:—

When therefore *the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself*

<sup>1</sup> Work cited, p. 209.

*baptized not, but his disciples*), he left Judæa, and departed again into Galilee.

The exegesis which can take this for a historical datum, and compose it with the theory of an oral tradition in which baptism either by Jesus or by his disciples never appears, is really outside serious discussion. The proposition that, given the main tradition, either Jesus or the disciples baptized freely, and that yet neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke ever heard of it, is a mere flouting of the critical reason to which it professes to appeal. And there is no alternative save an honest confession that the record is incredible. The whole Christian tradition of baptism breaks down on examination, as does the record of the acceptance of the higher mission of Jesus by John, followed by statements affirming the continuance of John's movement and teaching alongside of the Jesuine. Mr. Wright is severe on the orthodox harmonists in general. "If I am right," he remarks, "the exhausting labours and tortuous explanations of the harmonists, in their endeavour to reconcile what cannot be reconciled, have been wasted."<sup>1</sup> That is exactly what the attentive reader must regretfully say of Mr. Wright's own reconstructions.

His handling of the problems of the date of the crucifixion and the duration of the Ministry is a warning to every student who desires to be loyal to critical principle. By his final admission, no one can tell whether the Ministry lasted one, two, three,

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 178.

four, ten, or twenty years. He frankly rejects Sir William Ramsay's attempt to salve as history Luke's story of the census. The alleged procedure, he sees, is simply impossible — "S. Luke evidently has somewhat misunderstood the situation"—and he solves the problem by throwing over Luke's opening chapters as late accretions. But the question of the duration of the Ministry, which is bound up with that of the date of the crucifixion, and thus lies at the very centre of the whole historic problem, he is content to leave as insoluble, yet without a mis-giving as to the historicity of the record.

John makes Jesus go four times to Jerusalem; while in the synoptics we note "the extraordinary fact that they do not bring Christ to Jerusalem until He entered it to be crucified."<sup>1</sup> John puts the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of the Ministry, and the synoptics place it at the close. Orthodox exegesis then assumes two cleansings, but "such a repetition is, to say the least, highly improbable," for Mr. Wright. "What end would such a repetition serve? And if repeated, why should not S. Mark or S. John have told us so?"<sup>2</sup> Why, indeed! So Mr. Wright suggests that the synoptics may have telescoped several years into one. "Events in real life move much more slowly."<sup>3</sup> They certainly do!

Yet, on the other hand, "the one-year ministry would solve many difficulties. It is the only scheme which reconciles S. Luke, S. Matthew, and S. John.

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 177.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 176.



Not improbably it is true: the more I consider it, the more attractive it appears.”<sup>1</sup> Such, evidently, was the view of the Christian and other Gnostics. But Irenæus, the first Father to handle the problem, declared for a ministry of about twenty years, founding not only on the quotation in John, “Thou art not yet fifty years old,” but on the fact that “all the elders who had known John the disciple of the Lord in Asia witness that he gave them this tradition.”<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, in Mr. Wright’s opinion, “ten years is the utmost length to which we can stretch the ministry without throwing overboard S. Luke’s chronology altogether.”<sup>3</sup> Yet Bishop Westcott declared concerning the record of Irenæus that, “however strange it may appear, some such view is not inconsistent with the only fixed historical dates which we have with regard to the Lord’s life, the date of His birth, His baptism, and the banishment of Pilate.” Thus turns the kaleidoscope of the tradition of which Harnack has latterly affirmed the “essential rightness, with a few important exceptions.”

It is hardly necessary to point out that the “oral” hypothesis, like the “documentary” and that of scattered logia, is more compatible with the negative than with the affirmative answer on the question of historicity. Contradictions and anomalies irreconcilable with the assumption of a real historical process present not difficulty but confirmation to the theory of a fictitious production, whether docu-

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* 186.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 187.

mentary or oral, to establish a transforming cult, supplying a quasi-historical basis where none such existed. Contradictory episodes and dicta stand for diverging sects and movements. Save for incidental concessions, all the traditionist schools alike ignore the grounds for inferring a long-continued modification of the Gospels at many hands; though, when Celsus late in the second century alleged the common practice of interpolation, Origen could only explain that it was the work of heretics. Such a procedure is for the rational critic only the natural continuance of the method of formation.

Over the point upon which Mr. Wright most completely diverges from the various Unitarian schools—his acceptance of the Fourth Gospel as essentially historical—we need not here concern ourselves. Those who can accept the Fourth *and* the Synoptics cannot be supposed to admit the application of criticism to fundamentals at all, however critically they may handle secondary issues. And they have their defence. The liberalizers who see that the Fourth as a whole is a work of invention, making free play with previous material, and yet cannot conceive that the synoptics had beforehand followed a similar method, can make no claim to critical consistency. They merely realize that the Fourth and the Synoptics cannot *all* be records of a real Life and Teaching, and they decide to reject the last rather than the prior documents. The argument from "vividness" and lifelike detail simply goes by the board. In the fourth Gospel

there are many more lifelike details than in the second ; but that is not allowed to count.

For the rational inquirer, however, the fact remains that the dismissal of the fourth Gospel is a beginning of historical as distinct from documentary discrimination ; and it is to those who have made such a beginning that a further critical argument falls to be addressed. Mr. Wright, facing a chaos of doctrinal contradictions and chronological divergences, falls back trustingly on the reflection that "after all we are not saved by the Gospels, but by Christ." He has no misgiving as to the evangelists being inspired. "Inspiration quickens their spiritual perception, but does not *altogether* preserve them from errors of fact": *e.g.* Mt. i, 9, 11 ; Mk. iii, 26 ; Lk. ii, 2 ; John xii, 3 ; Acts v, 36 ; vii, 16.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps Mr. Wright would grant some dozens more of errors of fact if pressed ; but his faith would not be modified unless he should be shaken on the resurrection. "History as well as criticism leaves us no room to question this. On so sure a foundation is our most holy faith erected."<sup>2</sup> For Mr. Wright that is supremely certain which a myriad Christian scholars now find incredible. And we can but take our leave of him with the question of the Jew of Celsus, "Did Jesus come into the world for this purpose, that we should not believe in him ? "

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* pp. 222, 223.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 123.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE METHOD OF M. LOISY

TURNING away, so to speak, to the Gentiles, we concentrate our case in countering that of the "emancipated" defenders of the historicity of the Founder, as put by M. Loisy, the equal of any of the German or English professionals in scholarly competence, and the superior of some of them in candour. Precisely because Catholicism yields least preparation for the work of critical science, one who slowly makes his way out of it into the "liberal" position is reasonably to be credited with a special capacity for the task. And he is on the whole the most useful theorist for the purposes of the "liberal" school, inasmuch as he is prepared to give up many documentary items to which others needlessly cling. Nonetheless, M. Loisy is a confident champion of the historicity of the gospel Jesus. He does not indeed combine his summary presentment of his case with a discussion of the myth theory—that he is content to put aside in mass with the epithet "superficial"; but he puts his own construction all the more unreservedly.

It is interesting to note his certitudes. No one of his school, perhaps, has more frequently claimed indubitability on points of inference. For instance:—



The advent of Jesus in the time of the procurator Pontius Pilate is a fact as certain as a thousand other facts on the subject of which no one dreams of raising the slightest suspicion; it is *not doubtful* that he announced the speedy coming of the kingdom of God.....*since* that idea.....which is the fundamental idea of the preaching of Christ in the synoptics, was *incontestably* that of his first disciples and Paul.....

Great as are the real obscurities of the evangelical history, they are less numerous than they seem, and *without doubt* also less considerable on the important points.

Paul.....does not say that Jesus predicted his death and resurrection. He does not even say what was the ground for his execution; but it *does not seem doubtful* that this ground was *precisely* the announcement of that kingdom of God which the apostles and Paul himself preached.

Paul and the other apostles practised exorcisms in the name of Jesus on certain patients. It is told that Jesus had done the same, and *without doubt* he had really done it, with still more assurance and more success than his disciples.

He [Jesus] *without doubt* never frequented the schools of the rabbins.

His family was *certainly* pious.

One fact is *certain*, that a seizure was concerted of which he [Judas] was the principal agent.

It was *without doubt* arranged [at the house of the high priest at earliest daylight] that they should content themselves with denouncing the Galilean prophet to the Roman authority.

*Without doubt* he [Jesus] expected to his last moment the succour which only death could bring him.

It was Peter, *it would seem*, who first obtained the proof and the definitive certainty [of the resurrection] that faith called for. One day, at dawn, fishing on the lake of Tiberias, he saw Jesus.

Already, *without doubt*, he had assembled around him the other disciples.<sup>1</sup>

It is enviable to be so *sans doute* on so many points in a narrative of which so much has had to be abandoned as myth. The odd thing is that with all these certitudes M. Loisy introduces his book with the declaration, "We must [*il faut*] now renounce writing the life of Jesus. All the critics agree in recognizing that the materials are insufficient for such an enterprise."<sup>2</sup> And then, after an introduction in which he contests the view that nothing can be written with certainty, he gives us a Life of Jesus which is simply Renan revised!

It is certainly brief; but that is because he is content to say only what he thinks there is to say, whereas his predecessors were at more or less pains to embed the thin thread of biography in a large mat of non-biographical material. M. Loisy seems to have become a little confused in the process of prefixing a critical introduction to three chapters of the former introduction to his commentary on the synoptics. "The present little book," he writes, "does not pretend to be that history which it is impossible to recover." Naturally not. But it proffers a Life of Jesus all the same.

M. Loisy is quite satisfied that there was a Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph, a "worker in wood, carpenter, furniture maker, wheelwright."<sup>3</sup> "And

<sup>1</sup> *Jésus et la tradition évangélique*, 1910, pp. 9, 12, 36, 40, 56, 57, 99, 102, 105, 113.

<sup>2</sup> So, for instance, Wernle: "On the basis of these oldest sources we can write no biography, no so-called Life of Jesus" (*Die Quellen des Lebens Jesu*, 1905, p. 82).

<sup>3</sup> Work cited, p. 56 sq.

Jesus followed originally the same profession." When he began his preaching of the speedy coming of the heavenly kingdom, "his mother Mary was a widow, with numerous children. It is not certain that Jesus was the eldest....." "It was probably John the Baptist who, unknowingly, awoke the vocation of the young carpenter of Nazareth. The crisis which traversed Judæa had evoked a prophet. ....This preaching of terror made a great impression.....John was usually on the Jordan, baptizing in the river those touched by his burning words. Jesus was drawn like many others.....He was baptized, *and remained some time in the desert.*"

And so it goes on. "What appears most probable" is that Jesus had already "passed some time in solitude. A time of reflection and of preparation was indispensable between the life of the carpenter and the manifestation of the preacher of the evangel. Pushed to the desert by the sentiment of his vocation, Jesus was bound (*devait*) to be pursued by a more and more clear consciousness of that vocation." Thus M. Loisy can after all expand his sources. It was after the imprisonment of the Baptist that Jesus felt he "was to replace him, and by the better title because he felt himself predestined to become the human chief of the Kingdom, there to fill the function of Messiah." But "almost in spite of himself" he worked miracles. From his first stay at Capernaum the sick were brought to him to heal; and, fearing that the thaumaturg might hurt the preacher of the Kingdom, he left the place, only to be followed up and forced to make

cures. "He operated with a peculiar efficacy on the category of patients supposed to be specially possessed by the demon.....He spoke to them with authority, and calm returned, at least for a time, to those troubled and unquiet souls." As to the greater cures, M. Loisy observes that "perhaps" there was ascribed to the healer the revivification of a dead maiden. On the instantaneous cures of lepers and the blind he naturally says nothing whatever.

The dilemma of M. Loisy here recalls that of Professor Schmiedel over the same problem. The latter, claiming that it would be "difficult to deny" healing powers to Jesus, in view of the testimonies, is fain to argue that the Healer's personal claim (Mt. xi, 5; Lk. vii, 22; not in Mk.) to have healed the sick, the blind, the deaf, the lepers, and raised the dead, meant only a spiritual ministration, inasmuch as the claim concludes: "the poor also have the Gospel preached to them." On this view the assumed healing power really counts for nothing; and the last clause, which Schmiedel contends would be an anti-climax if the healings were real, becomes absolutely an anti-climax of the most hopeless kind. One day men will dismiss such confusions by noting that the theory of spiritual healing, an attempt to evade the mass of miracle, is only miracle-mongering of another kind. Are we to take it that regeneration of the morally dead, deaf, blind, and leprous is to be effected wholesale by a little preaching? Did the Christian community then consist wholly or mainly of these?

M. Loisy in turn blanches at a claim in which



“raising the dead” figures as a customary thing, with cures of leprosy and blindness; and he too falls back on the “spiritual” interpretation,<sup>1</sup> failing to note the flat fallacy of making the preaching to the poor at once a contrast and a climax to the spiritual healings, which also, on the hypothesis, are precisely matters of preaching. The Teacher is made to say: “I raise the spiritually dead, and cure the spiritually leprous, deaf, and blind, by preaching to them: to the poor I just preach.” Schmiedel does not see that the preaching of the Gospel to the poor is added as the one thing that could be said to be done for them, who would otherwise have had no benefit; and that on his own view he ought to treat this as a late addition. On the contrary, he insists that the “evangelists” could not have thought of adding it; and that it makes an excellent climax if we take the healings to be purely spiritual.

The rational argument would be, of course, that the first writer did make the Lord talk figuratively; and that a later redactor, *taking the words literally*, added the item of the poor, which he could not have done if he took them figuratively. But the irreducible fallacy is the assumption that as a figurative claim the speech is historic, one order of miracle being held allowable when another is not. Schmiedel has exemplified his own saying that “with very few exceptions all critics fall into the very grave error of immediately accepting a thing as true as soon as they have found themselves able to trace it to a

<sup>1</sup> *Les Évangiles*, i, 663 sq.

'source'."<sup>1</sup> It does not in the least follow that by substituting spiritual for physical miracle we acquire a right to claim historicity. And by the claim we simply cancel the "fame" of the records.

M. Loisy, committing himself to some acts of healing where Schmiedel, after accepting the general claim, commits himself to none, balances vaguely between acts of faith-healing so-called and cures of sheer insanity, and accepts the tradition of

an unfruitful point at Nazareth.<sup>2</sup> "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country and among his own kin, and in his own house," Jesus had said before the disdainful astonishment of his fellow-citizens and the incredulity of his family; and he could work no miracle in that place.

M. Loisy, it will be observed, here assumes that we are dealing with real cures, and tacitly rejects the qualifying clauses in Mark vi, 5, and Matthew xiii, 58, as he well may. They are indeed stamped with manipulation. "He could there do no mighty work *save that* he laid his hands upon a few sick folk and healed them," says the first; "he did not *many* mighty works there because of their unbelief," says the other. Such passages raise in an acute form the question how *any* statement in the Gospels can reasonably be taken as historical. What *were* the alleged mighty works done elsewhere save acts of

<sup>1</sup> *Encyc. Bib.* as cited, col. 1,872.

<sup>2</sup> It should be remembered that the Gospels do not specify Nazareth, but speak simply of "his own country" (*πατρίς*). Professor Burkitt, recognizing the mass of difficulties in regard to Nazareth, suggests that that name is a "literary error," and that the *πατρίς* of Jesus was Chorazin (Proc. of Brit. Acad. vol. v, 1912, pp. 17-18).

healing the sick? And how many cases for such healing would naturally be presented by one small hamlet? If, again, all the healings were spiritual, what are we left with beyond the truism that *sinner*s who did not believe were unbelieving?

As the modifications produce pure counter-sense, it is critically permissible to surmise that they were lacking in the first copies, and were inserted merely to guard against profane cavils. But as the whole episode is found only in Matthew and Mark, it cannot figure in Dr. Petrie's Nucleus; and for similar reasons it is absent from the Primitive Gospel of the school of Bernhard Weiss. M. Loisy, recognizing that it is the kind of item that Luke would avoid for tactical reasons, is loyal enough to accept it as historical without the modifying words, and seeks no better explanation than that given in the cited words of Jesus.

For those who aim at a rational comprehension of the documents, the critical induction is that the story was inserted for a reason; and the explanation which satisfies M. Loisy is so ill-considered that it only emphasizes the need. A prophet is likely to be looked at askance by his own people: yes, if he be an unimpressive one; but upon what critical principles is M. Loisy entitled to assume, as he constantly does, that the historic Jesus made a profound and ineffaceable impression upon all who came in contact with him, from the moment of his call to his disciples, and that nevertheless he had not made the slightest impression of superiority upon his own kinsmen and fellow-villagers, up to

the age of thirty? How can such propositions cohere? Jesus has only to leave Nazareth and to command men to follow him, in order to be reverently recognized as a Superman: for M. Loisy, it is his mere personality that creates the faith which, after his death, makes his adherents proclaim him as a re-arisen God. Is this the kind of personality that in an eastern village would be known merely as that of "the carpenter," or the carpenter's son?

M. Loisy, it is true, claims that Jesus had needed a period of solitude and meditation in the desert to make him a teacher, thus partly implying that before that experience the destined prophet might not be recognizable as such. But is it a historic proposition that the short time of solitude had worked a complete transformation? Was a quite normal or commonplace personality capable of such a transfiguration in a natural sense? That the critic had not even asked himself the question is made plain by his complete failure to raise the cognate question in regard to the marvellous healing powers with which he unhesitatingly credits the teacher, on the strength of the wholly supernaturalist testimony of the Gospels. These powers, according to M. Loisy, were also the instantaneous result of the short period of solitude in the desert. What pretensions can such a theory make to be in conformity with historical principles? Cannot M. Loisy see that he has only been miracle-mongering with a difference?

It is bad enough that we should be asked to take



for granted, on the strength of a typically Eastern record of wholesale thaumaturgy, a real "natural" gift for healing a variety of nervous disorders. But a natural gift of such a kind at least presupposes some process of development. M. Loisy obviously asks us to believe that all of a sudden a man who had throughout his life shown no abnormal powers or qualities whatever, began to exercise them upon the largest scale almost immediately after he had left his native village. Now, whatever view be taken of the cynical formula that a prophet has no honour in his own village, it is idle to ask us to believe that a great healer has none. The local healer of any sort has an easy opening; and the redacted Gospels indicate uneasy recognition of the plain truth that Jesus needed only to heal the sick at Nazareth as elsewhere to conquer unbelief. It was precisely the cures that, in the Gospel story, had won him fame in the surrounding country. M. Loisy has merely burked the problem.

A little later he takes as historical the "terrible invectives" pronounced against Capernaum and the neighbouring cities, which he attempts to explain. After all, the multitude had not gone beyond a "benevolent curiosity, quite ready to transform itself into an ironical incredulity. They had seen the miracles; they awaited meantime the kingdom, without otherwise preparing for it; and as the kingdom did not come they inclined less and less to believe in it." So they were doomed to a terrible judgment for their faithlessness. But why then was

nothing said of the wholly unbelieving Nazareth? <sup>1</sup> If the towns which would not receive the disciples were to be testified against, what should be the fate of the hostile birthplace?

Before such problems, the method of "liberal" accommodation here as always breaks down. To the eye of the evolutionist there is no great mystery. The avowal that the Founder either *could not* or did not work wonders at Nazareth might serve any one of several conceivable purposes. It might meet the cavils of those who in a later day found and said that nothing was known at Nazareth of a wonder-working Jesus who had dwelt there; even as the often-repeated story of the command to healed persons to keep silence could avail to turn the attacks of investigating doubters in regard to the miraculous cures. Or it might serve either to impugn the pretensions of those who at one stage of the movement called themselves "Nazarenes" in the sense of followers of the man of Nazareth, or to include the birthplace with the family and the disciples in that disparagement of the Jewish surroundings which would arise step for step with the spread of the Gentile movement. Any of these explanations is reasonable beside the thesis that a man gifted with marvellous healing powers, suddenly developed without any previous sign of them, could either find no one in his own village to let him try them, or to recognize them even when applied there,

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 147, *note*, as to the theory of Prof. Burkitt, that Jesus was born at Chorazin. On that view, the unbelieving birthplace was denounced.

while the country round about, *ex hypothesi*, was ringing with his fame. And the criticism which puts us off with such solutions is really not well entitled to impute "superficiality" to those who reject it.

The whole "carpenter" story, in which M. Loisy sees no difficulty, is one of the weakest of the Gospel attempts at circumstantiality. A trade or calling for the Messiah, as a true Jew, was perhaps as requisite in the eyes of some Jews as either a Davidic descent or an argument to prove that Davidic descent was for the Messiah unnecessary—*both* of which requirements the Gospels meet. Every good Jew, we are told, was required to have a handicraft or profession. A "Ben-Joseph," again, was called-for to meet the requirement, common among the Samaritans but not confined to them, of a Messiah so named.<sup>1</sup> But how came it that "the carpenter" of Mark is only "the carpenter's

<sup>1</sup> Strauss, in pointing to this detail in Jewish Messianism (*Das Leben Jesu*, Abschn. III, Kap. i, § 112) abstained from stressing it on the score that there are no certain traces of it before the Babylonian *Gemara*, the compilation of which took place in the Christian era, and the book *Shohar*, of which the age is doubtful. Principal Drummond (*The Jewish Messiah*, 1877, p. 357) further agreed, with Gfrörer, that the doctrine of a Messiah Ben-Joseph is extremely unlikely to have been pre-Christian. The obvious answer is that it is overwhelmingly unlikely to have been post-Christian! But that thesis is apparently not now maintained even by orthodox scholars. Bousset, who in his confused way suggests that the notion of a suffering and dying Messiah "would seem to have been suggested by disputations with the Christians" (*The Anti-Christ Legend*, 1896, p. 103), avows immediately that Wünsche traces "a very distinct application of Zechariah xii, 10, to the Messiah Ben Joseph" in the Jerusalem Talmud; and goes on to suggest that the notions of the "two witnesses" and the two Messiahs "may rest upon a common source, which, however, is still to be sought further back than Jewish tradition."

son" in Matthew? We can conceive the Gentilizing Luke putting both statements aside as ill-suited to his purpose, his Jesus being a God competing with Gentile Gods; but if there really was an early knowledge that Jesus was a carpenter, why should Matthew minimize it? And how came it that Origen<sup>1</sup> knew of no Gospel "current in the churches" in which Jesus was described as a carpenter?

In this matter, as about the Infancy generally, the apocryphal gospels are as rich in detail as the canonical are poor. Again and again does Joseph figure in them as a working carpenter, or plough-maker, or house-builder.<sup>2</sup> The words of Origen might imply that it was from some such source that Celsus drew his statement that Jesus was a carpenter; and yet none of the preserved apocrypha speaks of Jesus as working at carpentry save by way of such miracles as that of the elongation of the piece of wood. Having regard to the mythical aspect of the whole, we suggest an easily misinterpreted Gnostic source for the basis. For some schools of the Gnostics, the Jewish God was the *Demiourgos*, the Artisan or Creator, a subordinate being in their divine hierarchy. The word could mean an artisan of any kind; and *architector*, the term in the Latin version of Thomas, points to a

<sup>1</sup> *Against Celsus*, vi, 36, end.

<sup>2</sup> *Protevang.*, ix, 1; *Pseud. Matt.*, x, 1; xxxvii, 1 sq.; *Hist. of Joseph the Carpenter*; Thomas, 1st. Gr. form, xiii, 1 sq.; 2nd Gr. form, xi, 1 sq.; Lat. xi, 2 sq.; *Arabic Gosp. of the Infancy*, xxxviii, xxxix.



reflex of the idea of "creator" which attached to the Gnostic term.

That the doctrine of the *Demiourgos* was already current in Jewish circles before the period commonly assigned to Christian Gnosticism has been shown with much probability by Dr. S. Karppe. In a Talmudic passage given as cited by Rabbi Jochanan ben Saccai before the middle of the first century, C.E., there is denunciation of those who "spare not the glory of the Creator"; and other passages interpret this in the sense of a heresy which "diminishes God" and "sows division between Israel and his God."<sup>1</sup> Debate of this kind emerges with the name of the Judæo-Christian heretic Cerinthus. For him, Jesus, though naturally born, was entered at his baptism by Christ, the son not of the Jewish God, the *Demiourgos*, but of the Supreme God.<sup>2</sup> There might well be, however, round Cerinthus, who retained Jewish leanings, Jews who held to the Judæo-Christian primary position that Jesus was the son of Yahweh. By some early Gnostics he could hardly fail to be so named. Could not then the Gnostic "Son of the *Demiourgos*," the Artificer, become for more literal Christists "son of the carpenter," even as the mystic seamless robe of Pagan myth became for

<sup>1</sup> Karppe, *Essais de critique et d'histoire de philosophie*, 1902, pp. 51-52.

<sup>2</sup> Irenæus, *Ag. Heresies*, i, 26; Hippolytus, *Ref. of all Heresies*, vii, 21. See Baur, *Das Christenthum*, p. 174. (Eng. trans. i, 199.) The fact that Cerinthus is the earliest known Christian Gnostic, being traditionally associated with the Apostle John (Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* iii, 28) goes far to support Dr. Karppe's view that Gnosticism entered Christianity from the Jewish side.

some a garment which had to be cut in pieces to be divided?

Met by such suggestions, M. Loisy tells us that we are superficial. But is he otherwise? Is he not simply evading his problem? Can he see nothing strange in the sudden mention of the carpenter in a "primary" gospel which had set out with a divine personage and had never mentioned his parents or upbringing? On the mythic theory the apparition of the Messiah without antecedents is precisely what was to be expected; if there was any clear Jewish expectation on the point, it was that he should come unlooked for, unheralded save, on one view, by "Elias."<sup>1</sup> Thus the Gospel record fits into the myth theory from the outset, while on the assumption of historicity it is but a series of enigmas.

Holding by that assumption, M. Loisy is forced to violent measures to reconcile the isolated Marcan mention of "the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon" with the repeated mentions in the closing chapters of (1) "Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses and Salome; *who when he was in Galilee followed [Jesus] and ministered unto him*"; (2) "Mary the mother of Joses"; and (3) "Mary the mother of James and Salome." In these closing chapters this Mary the mother of James and Joses and Salome figures first

<sup>1</sup> Cp. *Apoc. of Baruch*, xxix, 3; 4 *Esdra*s, vii, 28; xiii, 32; John, vii, 27; Justin, *Dial. cum Tryph.*, 8; and Charles's note on *Apoc. of Baruch*, as cited, giving these and other references. See also Schodde's ed. of the *Book of Enoch*, pp. 47, 57; and the Rev. W. J. Deane's *Pseudepigrapha*, 1891, p. 17.

as simply one who followed and ministered to Jesus, then as the mother of Joses, then as the mother of James and Salome, but *never* as the mother of Jesus. By what right does M. Loisy extract his certitude from the prior text?

His simple course is to decide that Mary the mother of James and of Joses and of Salome in the closing chapters is *not* Mary the mother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon in chapter vi. "Certain Fathers," he had noted in his great work on the Synoptics (citing in particular Chrysostom), "desirous of making the synoptics accord with John, identify Mary the mother of James and Joses [in ch. xv] with the mother of Jesus; but it is evident that if the synoptics had thought of the mother of the Saviour they would not have thus designated her."<sup>1</sup> Precisely! And if the Gospel of Mark in its original form had contained the passage in chapter vi, how could it possibly have spoken in chapter xv of a Mary the mother of James and Joses without indicating either that she was or was not the same Mary? Would it have deliberately specified two Maries, each the mother of a James and a Joses, without a word of differentiation?

To the faithful critic there is only one course open. He is bound to conclude that the passage in chapter vi is a late interpolation, the work of an inventor who had perhaps either accepted or anticipated the Johannine record that Mary the mother

<sup>1</sup> *Les évangiles synoptiques*, 1907-8, ii, 697.

of Jesus was present at the crucifixion, but who did not—perhaps in his copy of Mark could not—completely carry out his purpose by making the Mary at the crucifixion the mother of the crucified Lord.

We are not here concerned with the exegesis of those Fathers who desired to save the perpetual virginity of Mary; our business is simply with the texts. And we can but say that if, with M. Loisy, we make the Mary of chapter xv another Mary than her of chapter vi, we are bound on the same principle to find a third and a fourth Mary in “the mother of Joses” (xv, 47) and the “mother of James and Salome” (xvi, 1).<sup>1</sup> It will really not do. The mythological theory, which traces the mourning Marias to an ancient liturgy of a God-sacrifice and finds the mother-Mary of chapter vi an alien element, may seem to M. Loisy superficial, but it meets a problem which he simply evades.

The only serious difficulties for M. Loisy, apparently, are the miracles and the prophecies. On the latter he makes no use of the Savonarola argument; and in his smaller work he ignores the “rock” text; but for him “the scene of Cæsarea Philippi, with the Messianic confession of Peter, seems thoroughly historic”; and on the other hand the story of Peter’s denial of his Master causes him no misgiving. For a rational reader, the conception

<sup>1</sup> The varying designations, certainly, point to repeated additions to the text. But the question arises whether the *Μαρια ἡ Ἰωσῆ* or *Μαρια Ἰωσῆ* of Mk. xv, 47, may have been meant to specify “Mary the wife of Joseph.”



of the shamed Peter figuring soon afterwards as the merciless judge and supernatural slayer of the unhappy Ananias is extremely indigestible. The personage thus evolved is not only detestable but incredible. How could the coward apostle figure primarily and continuously as a pillar of the Church described? Harnack's method, as Professor Blass complains,<sup>1</sup> treats the denigration of Peter as the result of the strife between the Judaizing and the Gentilizing sections of the early Church; it is the natural hypothesis. Without it we are left to the detestable and impossible figure of the apostle who denies his Lord and has no mercy for a weak brother who merely keeps back part of a sum of money when professing freely to donate the whole. The critical reader will prefer to follow Harnack.

But if we give up the story of the Denial, how shall we retain those which exalt and glorify the Judaizing apostle? If we give up Matthew's "rock" texts, with what consistency can we take as pure history the episode in Mark in which Peter, first of the twelve, declares "Thou art the Christ," eliciting the charge to "tell no man of him," followed by the prediction of death and resurrection, spoken "openly"? The episode in Mark passes into, and in Matthew is followed by, the fierce rebuke to the expostulating Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men"—a strange sequel to Matthew's "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah;

<sup>1</sup> *Entstehung*, p. 22. Of course Harnack's method is really only a development of Baur's.

for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven."

This is one of the passages that force the conclusion either that "Mark" had before him the fuller record, in "Matthew" or elsewhere, and turned it from a Petrine to an anti-Petrine purpose, or that a redactor did so. There is no escape from the evidence that we are dealing with two sharply conflicting constructions. The "Blessed art thou" passage and the "Satan" passage will not cohere. Which came first? Had "Luke" either before him? His "Get thee behind me, Satan" (iv, 8; A.V.), addressed to the devil in the Temptation, is ejected from the revised text as being absent from most of the ancient codices; and its presence in the Alexandrine suggests an attempt to get in *somewhere* a saying which otherwise had no place in the third Gospel. The absence alike of the blessing and the aspersion on Peter sets up the surmise that both are quite late, and that the insertion of one elicited the other.

Again and again we find in the Gospels such traces of a strife over Petrine pretensions. In the story of the Denial, which we have found so incompatible with the attitude ascribed to Peter in the Acts, everyone since Strauss has recognized a process of redaction and interpolation. M. Loisy, saying nothing of the central problem, avowedly finds in Mark "a manipulation, deliberate and ill-managed, of a more simple statement."<sup>1</sup> This might have

<sup>1</sup> *Les évangiles synoptiques*, ii, 617.

sufficed to put him on his guard ; but all he has to say, after reducing the confused details to the inferred "simpler statement," is that "*if* there is in any part of the second Gospel a personal recollection of Peter it is the story of the denial in the form in which Mark found it."<sup>1</sup> Which makes sad havoc of the Peter-Mark tradition ; for the story of the denial betrays itself as a late anti-Petrine invention, as aforesaid.

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 618.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE TRIAL CRUX

THUS lax in his treatment of the subsidiary historical problems, M. Loisy is of necessity accommodating when he faces those which he recognizes to be central. Over the story of the "purification" of the temple—which Origen found at once unjustifiable and signally miraculous, since it was inconceivable that so great a multitude should have yielded to the mere attack of one man with a scourge of small cords—he has again no misgivings. He feels that some such story was needed to motive the priestly action against Jesus.<sup>1</sup> In the story of the astonishing sophism ascribed to Jesus on the subject of the tribute to Cæsar he sees only "cleverness" (*habileté*); and yet he accepts as historical—again by necessity of his thesis—Jesus's admission that he claimed to be king of the Jews. In the story of the betrayal he sees fit, docilely following Brandt, to allege "a little confused fighting, some blows given and received" over and above the cutting off of the ear of Malchus, an imagined item which he finds in none of the Gospels. Over the prayers of the Lord while the disciples slept he had hesitated in his commentary;<sup>2</sup> falling back on the notable avowal

<sup>1</sup> *Jésus et la tradition*, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> *Les évangiles synoptiques*, ii, 562.



that "the sort of incoherence which results from describing a scene which passed while the witnesses [!] were asleep is *without doubt* to be explained by the origin and character of the narrative rather than by a negligence of the narrator." For once, I unreservedly assent to the *sans doute*. Quite unwittingly, M. Loisy has put himself in line with our mythical theory, which postulates a drama as the origin of the narrative.

All the same, he accepts the narrative as history; and he sees nothing in the fusion of the two speeches: "Sleep on.....It is enough.....Arise now,"..... though he rejects the proposal of Bleek, Volkmar, and Wellhausen to turn "Sleep on" into an interrogation,<sup>1</sup> and admits that the "It is enough" is an "unclear and very insufficient transition" from "Sleep on" to "Arise." Once more, which is the more superficial, this lame handling or the recognition of a transcribed drama with two speeches combined because of the omission of an exit and an entrance, in what M. Loisy admits to be "a highly dramatic *mise en scène*"?

But it is over the trial in the house of the high priest that M. Loisy most astonishingly redacts the narrative. In his commentary he recognizes that Matthew's story, in which the scribes and the elders are "already gathered together" in the dead of night when Jesus is brought for trial, and the story of Mark, in which they "come together with" the high priest, are equally incredible; and that the

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 570.

story of the quest for witnesses in the night is still more so.

Once again we have a *sans doute* with which we can agree. "The nocturnal procedure, no doubt, did not take place."<sup>1</sup> Recognizing further that a Jewish blasphemer was by the Levitical law to be stoned, not crucified, he simply gives up the whole narrative as a product of "the Christian tradition," bent on saddling the Jews rather than the Romans with the responsibility of the crucifixion.<sup>2</sup> In his smaller work he simply cuts the knot and alleges:—

"As soon as the first daylight had come (*dès les premiers lueurs du jour*), a reunion was held at the house of (*chez*) the chief priest," where it was without doubt [!] arranged that they should content themselves with denouncing the Galilean prophet to the Roman authority as a disturber and a false Messiah. But it was necessary to arrange the terms of the accusation and distribute the rôles, to get together and prepare the witnesses. *These measures were soon taken. As soon as morning had come (dès le matin)* the priests brought their prisoner chained before the tribunal of Pontius Pilate.<sup>3</sup>

One certainly cannot call this manipulation of the texts "superficial." It is sheer deliberate dissolution and reconstruction of the narrative, by way of substituting something more plausible for the incredible original, when all the while the credibility of the original is the thesis maintained. And yet even the reconstruction is so thoughtlessly managed that we get only a slightly less impossible account. Only a scholar who never followed the details of a

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 599.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 610.

<sup>3</sup> *Jésus et la tradition*, p. 102.

legal process could suggest that the task of hunting up witnesses and arranging a procedure could be carried through between "earliest dawn" and "morning." And for the headlong haste of such a procedure, only an hour or so after the arrest of the prisoner, no explanation is even suggested. A violent impossibility in the record, destructive of all faith in its historicity at this point, is sought to be saved by a violent redaction which simply "makes hay" of the very documents founded on. And this illicit violence is resorted to because M. Loisy recognizes that if he is to retain a historical Jesus at all he must bring the whole trial story into a historical shape. He certainly had cause to take drastic measures. Long ago it was pointed out that by Jewish law a prisoner must not be condemned to death on the day of his trial: *Judicia de capitalibus finiunt eodem die si sint ad absolutionem; si vero sint ad damnationem, finiuntur die sequente*.<sup>1</sup> This might alone suffice to "bring into doubt" the priestly trial; to say 'nothing of the modern Jewish protest that a capital prosecution and execution on either the day after or the day of the Passover, at the instance of the High Priest, was unthinkable.<sup>2</sup> There were good reasons, then, for seeking to found on the trial before Pilate.

Let us now survey broadly the process of historical criticism thus far. 1. At an early stage the re-constructors gave up as pure fiction the third trial

<sup>1</sup> Babl. Sanhedrin, ap. Lightfoot, cited by Strauss.

<sup>2</sup> Compare the other Jewish declarations collected by Brandt, *Die evangelische Geschichte*, 1893, p. 150 sq.

before Herod, which appears solely in Luke. They did not ask what historical knowledge, or what sense of history, can have existed in a community among which such an absolute invention found ready currency. 2. The next step was to reject as "unhistorical" the narrative of the fourth Gospel, in which Jesus (*a*) is examined by Annas the high priest, but in no sense tried; (*b*) is then sent bound to Caiaphas the high priest; (*c*) is immediately passed on from Caiaphas to Pilate, who examines him within doors while the priests remain outside, there being thus no Jewish witnesses; (*d*) tells Pilate "My kingdom is not of this world," and convinces him that he is not punishable. Rejecting this account, as they well might, the reconstructors failed to ask themselves what such an invention signifies. 3. Next disappears the so-called historical narrative of the trial before the high priest and chief priests in the synoptics.<sup>1</sup> That in turn, taken on its merits, is found flagrantly incredible; and now M. Loisy in effect puts it aside, reducing it to a fundamentally different form.

Three of the trial stories are thus in turn rejected as hopelessly unhistorical. And now we are invited to regard as "incontestable" the fourth, the trial before Pilate as related in the synoptics; the Johannine version being dismissed as fiction. In the scientific sense of the word<sup>2</sup> the rejected stories

<sup>1</sup> In Luke the high priest is not in the story, and the chief priests and others *take as well as try* the prisoner.

<sup>2</sup> See *Christianity and Mythology*, 2nd ed. pp. xviii, 2, 122; *Pagan Christs*, 2nd ed. p. 287, note 4.



have been classed as myths. And still we are told that the "myth-theory" is outside discussion.

Yet, even in coming to the trial before Pilate, M. Loisy has to begin by noting the improbability that the entire sanhedrim should have attended it, as is alleged by the synoptics. "In the minds of the evangelists the sanhedrim represents the Jews, and it was the Jews who caused the death of Jesus. Hence the general expressions which the redactors used the more willingly because they were very incompletely informed on the facts."<sup>1</sup> Still, the trial must stand good. Judas goes the way of myth; but the unintelligible procedure of Pilate must be salved. With his general loyalty to the facts as he sees them M. Loisy notes, with Brandt, that in the synoptics as in John there is no Jesuist eye-witness or auditor to report for the faithful what took place. "Here begin the gaps in the Passion-history," remarks Brandt.<sup>2</sup> "Tradition could learn only by indirect ways the general features of the interrogation and the principal incidents which passed between the morning of Friday and the hour of the crucifixion," says Loisy.<sup>3</sup> The student really concerned to get at history is compelled to pronounce that the record thus avowed to be mainly guesswork is myth. Let us take the report as we have it in Mark:—

And straightway [after the condemnation by the priests] in the morning the chief priests, with the

<sup>1</sup> *Les évangiles*, ii, 624.

<sup>2</sup> *Die evangelische Geschichte*, 1893, p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> *Les évangiles*, ii, 632.

elders and scribes and the whole council, held a consultation, and bound Jesus and carried him away, and delivered him up to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answering saith unto him, Thou sayest.....And Pilate again asked him, saying, Answerest thou nothing? behold how many things they accuse thee of. But Jesus no more answered anything; inso-much that Pilate marvelled.

To this meagre record, in which a capital case is carried before the governor without the slightest documentary preliminaries, and in which he begins to interrogate before a word has been said about the indictment, Matthew adds nothing save the story of Pilate's wife's dream, which the reconstructors are fain to dismiss; while Luke, who sees fit to premise specific charges of anti-Roman sedition, follows them up simply by Pilate's question and Jesus's assenting answer; and then, quite unintelligibly, makes Pilate declare "unto the chief priests and the multitudes, I find no fault in this man."

What can it mean? All the exegetes now agree that the "Thou sayest" of Jesus has the force of "I am."<sup>1</sup> By avowing that he called himself King of the Jews he committed a very grave offence towards Rome, unless he explained the title in a mystic sense; and the records exclude any such explanation. In Mark and Matthew the effect is the same: Pilate finds no guilt, and proposes release; but yields to the multitude and the priests. Could any serious student bring himself to regard this as

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.* Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, p. 312; Brandt, *Die evangelische Geschichte*, p. 89; Loisy, *Les évangiles*, ii, 517, note; 604, note; 633.

history unless he presupposed the historicity of the crucifixion and was ready to let pass any semblance of motivation for it?

Once more we must affirm that the documents merely reveal entire ignorance of any judicial procedure. Pilate finally puts to death a Jewish prisoner at the request of the sanhedrim and the multitude on a charge for which he finds no evidence. That Pilate should make light of a Jew's life is indeed easily to be believed: he is exhibited to us by Josephus as an entirely ruthless Roman; but both the synoptics and the fourth Gospel present him in an entirely different light; and no record or commentary makes it intelligible that the Roman governor should crucify a politically unoffending Jew for a purely ecclesiastical Jewish offence. The offence against Rome he is expressly represented as finding imaginary; and yet on the other hand the offence as avowed is very real. By the method of mere accommodation or partial critical rationalism the ascription of the prosecution to the Jews is accounted for as the result of the later developed anti-Judaism of the Christians. But on that view what historical basis have we left? If the later Christians could invent the trial and the Resurrection, what was to prevent their inventing the crucifixion? M. Loisy admits that if the trial goes the historicity of Jesus goes with it; then the crucifixion becomes myth. To say that this is impossible is to beg the question: the myth theory offers the solution.

Given the datum of an original cult-sacrament

which had grown out of an ancient ritual-sacrifice, the crucifixion is the first step towards the establishment of a biography of Jesus. A trial and a condemnation, again, are necessary preliminaries to that; and when we critically examine these we find that they are patently unhistorical. Upon no theory of historicity can their contradictions and impossibilities be explained. Once we make the hypothesis, however, that the crucifixion is itself myth, the imbroglio becomes intelligible.

What we do know historically is that the early Christists included Judaizers and Gentilizers; this is established by the sect-history, apart from the Acts and the Epistles. For the Judaizers an execution by the Romans was necessary; for the Gentilizers, who were bound to guard against official Roman resentment, and whose hostility to the Jews was progressive, a Jewish prosecution was equally necessary. In the surviving mystery-play, predominantly a Gentile performance as it now stands in the Gospels, an impossible Jewish trial is followed by an equally impossible Roman trial, in which Jesus by doctrinal necessity avows that he is King of the Jews, thereby salving his Messiahship; while, to keep the guilt on Jewish shoulders and to exclude the suspicion of anti-Roman bias, Pilate is made to disclaim all responsibility. Such is, briefly, the outcome of the myth theory. Upon what other theory can the documents be explained?

Upon what other theory, again, can we explain the vast contrast between the triumphal entry into Jerusalem a few days before and the absolute



unanimity of the priest-led multitude in demanding the execution of Jesus against the wish of Pilate? The reconstructors accept both items, with arbitrary modifications, as historical; though the story of the entry is preceded by a mythical item about the choice of the ass-foal whereon never man had sat,<sup>1</sup> which is much more stressed and developed than the main point. We are asked to believe that Jesus on his entry is enthusiastically acclaimed by a great multitude as Son of David and King of Israel; and that a few days later not a voice is raised to save his life. Gentilizing Christians could easily credit such things of the Jews. Can a historical student do so? For the former it was enough that in the narrative the Messiahship of the Lord had been publicly accepted; coherence was not required. But historicity means coherence.

Last of all, the item of Barabbas, one of the elaborate irrelevancies which leap to the eye in a narrative so destitute of essentials, turns out to carry a curious corroboration to the myth-theory. This is not the place to develop the probable kinship of the Barabbas of the Gospels with the (misspelt) Karabbas<sup>2</sup> of Philo; but we may note the probable reason for the introduction of the name into the myth. As the story stands, it serves merely to

<sup>1</sup> This is the one of the two stories preferred by the "liberal" school, who dismiss the story of the *two asses* as a verbal hallucination rather than recognize a *zodiacal myth*. It makes no final difference. The "ass the foal of an ass," in their exegesis, still means an unbroken colt, an impossible steed for a procession.

<sup>2</sup> See *Pagan Christs*, 2nd ed., and *Christianity and Mythology*, 2nd ed., per index.

heighten the guilt of the Jews, making them in mass save the life of a murderer rather than that of the divine Saviour. The whole story is plainly unhistorical: "neither these details nor those which follow," remarks M. Loisy (after noting the "extremely vague indications under an appearance of precision" in regard to the antecedents of Barabbas), "seem discussible from the point of view of history."<sup>1</sup> In point of fact, Pilate is made to release an ostensible ringleader of "men who in *the* insurrection [unspecified] had committed murder," thus making his action doubly inconceivable. Why was such an item introduced at all?

It is not a case for very confident explanation; but when we note that Barabbas means "Son of the Father"; that the Karabbas of Philo is treated as a mock-king; and that the reading "Jesus Barabbas" in Matt. xxvii, 16, 17, was long the accepted one in the ancient church,<sup>2</sup> we are strongly led to infer (1) that the formula "Jesus the Son of the Father" was *well known* among the first Christians as being connected with a popular rite—else how could such a strange perplexity be introduced into the text?—and (2) that the real reason for introducing it was that those anti-Christians who knew of the name and rite in question used their knowledge against the faith. The way to rebut them was to present Jesus Barabbas not only as a murderer but as the man actually released to

<sup>1</sup> *Les évangiles*, ii, 643.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholson, *The Gospel According to the Hebrews*, 1879, pp. 141-42.

the Jewish people instead of Jesus the Christ, proposed to be released by Pilate.

Again, then, on the mythical theory, we find a meaning and a sane solution where the historical theory can offer none. Sir James Frazer's hypothesis that the story of the triumphal entry may preserve a tradition of a mock-royal procession for a destined victim is only a partial solution; and his further hypothesis of a strangely ignored *coincidence* between a Barabbas rite and the actual crucifixion of the Christian "Son of the Father" is but a sacrifice of mythological principle to the assumption of historicity. The conception of Jesus as sacrificed lies at the core of early Christian cult-propaganda.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE JESUS-FIGURE OF M. LOISY

It is the same, finally, with the story of the original evangel as with the story of the tragedy; M. Loisy fails to come within sight of historicity in the one case as in the other. Having fallen back on the thesis, so popularized by Renan, that faith in the necessary resurrection of the Messiah created the legend of the empty tomb and the divine apparitions, he proceeds to formulate the Teaching which had created the faith. The historic creed of Christianity is thus figured as a pyramid poised on the apex of a hallucination; but we are assured that the hallucination resulted from the greatness of the Personality of the slain Teacher.

Taking no note of any other conception of a possible origination of the cult, M. Loisy pronounces that to explain it we must hold that the "group of adherents" had before the crucifixion evolved a "religious life" sufficiently deep to sustain the feeling that the death of the Master was an accident, "grave no doubt [!] and perturbing, but reparable";<sup>1</sup> and to explain this religious life he goes back to the Master's doctrine. And the moment he begins his exposition he vacillates anew over the old dilemma:—

<sup>1</sup> *Jésus et la tradition*, p. 114.



Jesus pursued a work, *not* the propagation of a belief; he did *not* explain theoretically the Kingdom of Heaven, he prepared its coming by exhorting men to repent. *Nevertheless* even the work of Jesus attaches itself to the idea of the celestial kingdom; it defines itself in that idea, which presupposes, implies, or involves with it other ideas. It is this combination of ideas familiar to Christ that we must reconstruct with the help of the Gospels.....The idea of the kingdom of God is, in a sense, all the Gospel; but it is also all Judaism.....<sup>1</sup>

Exactly. Jesus, in effect, preached just what the Baptist is said to have preached; only without baptism. The monition to repent was simply the monition of all the prophets and all the eschatologists; and it had not the attraction of baptism which the evangel of the Baptist was said to have. So that the Twelve, on the showing of M. Loisy, went through Jewry uttering only one familiar phrase—and casting out devils—and dooming those who refused to hear them. And, by their own report, it was in casting out devils that they had their success. The simple *name* of Jesus, according to the Gospels, availed for that where he had never appeared in person. Yet, again, the name is used by non-adherents for the same purpose (Mk. ix, 38). And still M. Loisy confidently claims that there is no trace of a pre-Christian Jesus cult in Palestine!<sup>2</sup>

Concerning the nullity of the original evangel he is quite unwittingly explicit when he is resisting the myth theory; albeit in the act of contradicting himself:—

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* pp. 117–18.

<sup>2</sup> *Apropos d'histoire des religions*, 1911, pp. 274–281.

Paul, indeed, proclaims [*se réclame du*] an immortal Christ, or more exactly a Christ dead and re-arisen, *not the Jesus preaching the evangel in Galilee and at Jerusalem*. But his attitude is easy to explain.....He was aware of the circumstances of the death of Christ, and of what was preached by his followers.....If he boasted of having learned nothing from the old [*sic*] apostles, it was that, in reality, he had never been at their school.....But he was able [*il lui arrive*] also to affirm the conformity of his teaching with theirs: that is what he did in the passage.....touching the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul converted had nothing to demand of the first apostles of Jesus, because he knew already what they had preached.<sup>1</sup>

So that the doctrine of an immortal or resurrected Christ was the sole doctrine of the Apostles. There was no other evangel. And this doctrine, which had just been declared to be born of the *personal* impression made by Jesus on his followers, is also the doctrine of Paul, who had never seen Jesus.

The primary evangel having thus simply disappeared, we revert to the Jesuine Teaching (addressed in large part only to the disciples) which had formed among disciples and adherents such a "religious life" as served to develop the conviction that the Master could not really die, and so prepared the foundation upon which Paul built historic Christianity.<sup>2</sup> We have seen how M. Loisy vacillates over the Founder's conception of the Kingdom of God in relation to his moral teaching. When it is a question of a myth theory, M. Loisy insists upon exactitude. "In order that the thesis should be

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* pp. 296-97.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 314.

sustainable, it would be necessary that a *well-defined* myth should have existed in some Jewish sect."<sup>1</sup> But there is no call for well-defined proofs or notions when it is a question of defending the tradition. For our critic, Jesus is first and foremost an intense believer in a miraculous advent of that Kingdom which had come simply to mean "the sovereignty of God."<sup>2</sup> Even this conception is of necessity vague to the last degree:—

The primitive nationalism subsisted at least in the framework [*cadre*] and the exterior economy of the kingdom of God; it maintained itself also in [*jusque dans*] the evangel of Jesus. At the same time the kingdom of God is not a simple moral reform, to safeguard the law of the celestial Sovereign and guarantee the happiness of the faithful. The action of Yahweh.....governs the entire universe.....[The cosmological tradition] developed the idea of a definite triumph of light over darkness, of order over chaos, a triumph which was to be the final victory of good over evil.....The terrestrial kingdoms..... were to disappear, to give place to the reign of Israel, which was the reign of the just, the reign of God. In this great instauration of the divine order, in this regeneration of the universe, the divine justice was to manifest itself by the resurrection of all the true faithful.<sup>3</sup>

This transformation, then—the long current dream of Jewry—was to be a vast miracle, and in that miracle Jesus believed he was to play the part of the Messiah, the divine representative. That expect-

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 280.

<sup>2</sup> So Dalman (*The Words of Jesus*, p. 94 sq.), as well as Loisy. They agree that "kingdom of heaven" was only a more reverent way of saying the same thing. (*Jésus et la tradition*, p. 128.)

<sup>3</sup> *Jésus et la tradition*, pp. 125-26.

tation sustained him till the moment of his death.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless "his idea of the reign of God was not a patriotic hallucination or the dream of an excited [*exalté*] mystic. The reign of God is the reign of justice."<sup>2</sup> (As if the second sentence proved the first.) And yet, all the while: "On the whole, the Gospel ethic is no more consistent than the hope of the kingdom.....Considered in themselves, as the Gospel makes them known to us, *they are not mythic, but mystic.*"<sup>3</sup>

Thus helped to a definite conception, we turn to the ethic, which we have seen to be in the main a compilation from Jewish literature. This fact M. Loisy admits, only to deny that it has any significance:—

He opposes the voice of his conscience to the tradition of the doctors. There lies precisely the originality of his teaching, which, if one recomposed the materials piece by piece, could be found scattered in the Biblical writings or in the sayings of the rabbis. *Like every man who speaks to men, Jesus takes his ideas in the common treasure of his environment and his time; but as to what he makes of it [pour le parti qu'il en tire] one does not say that it proceeds from any one. This independence results, probably, at once from his character and from the circumstances of his education.*<sup>4</sup>

Thus, as regards the Sermon on the Mount, the act of collecting a number of ethical precepts and maxims from the current literature and lore of one's people and curtly enouncing them, without

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 105. Cp. p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> *Apropos d'histoire des religions*, p. 287.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* pp. 288-89. <sup>4</sup> *Jésus et la tradition*, p. 136.



development, is a proof of supreme moral originality, and is to be regarded as opposing the voice of one's conscience to tradition. Had the rabbis, then, no conscience? Was their ethic a mere tradition, even when they gave out or originated the maxims of the Sermon on the Mount? Was Hillel but a mouth-piece of the law? M. Loisy must in justice pardon us for avowing that so far he has but duplicated a worn-out paralogism, and that he has evaded the plain documentary fact that the Sermon is a literary compilation,<sup>1</sup> and not a discourse at all.

And when we turn to specific teachings, his commentary does but compel us to ask how the teaching which he insists upon taking as genuinely uttered by the Teacher can be associated with the Messianist he has been describing. Accepting as genuine the story of the woman taken in adultery, now bracketed in the English Revised Version as being absent from the most ancient manuscripts, but presumably found in the lost Gospel of the Hebrews,<sup>2</sup> he remarks that "the elect of the kingdom must not use marriage; they were to be as the angels in heaven";<sup>3</sup> and at the same time he describes the veto on divorce as "a trait so personal to the teaching of Christ, and so difficult to comprehend if one denies all originality to that teaching."<sup>4</sup> That is to say, the believer in the speedy end of all marriage relations, and the

<sup>1</sup> Schmiedel pronounces it a "conglomerate." *Encyc. Bib. art. GOSPELS*, col. 1,886.

<sup>2</sup> See Nicholson, *The Gospel according to the Hebrews*, 1879, p. 52 sq.

<sup>3</sup> *Jésus et la tradition*, p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> *Id. ib.* and *Apropos d'histoire des religions*, p. 288.

establishment of a new and angelic life for all who survive, occupied himself earnestly with the restriction or abolition of divorce!

At other junctures M. Loisy is ready to see how the doctrines of sections and movements in the later Christian Church were introduced into the Gospels. He will not admit of such an explanation here. Does he then see a supreme moral inspiration in the Montanists and other Christian sectaries who set their faces against the sexual instinct? Has he forgotten the text in Malachi (ii, 14-16), vetoing a heartless divorce? And has he never heard of the saying of Rabbi Eliezer, echoed elsewhere in the Talmud, that the altar sheds tears over him who puts away his first wife? Is the moral originality of the Gospel teaching to be established by merely ignoring all previous teaching to the same effect?

But it is hardly necessary thus to revert to the question of the ethical originality of the Gospel teaching: the essential issue here is the impossible combination presented to us by M. Loisy as his historical Jesus. Without any sign of misgiving he offers us the figure of a mystic awaiting the imminent end of the old order of things and the substitution of a new and heavenly order, doubled with a moralist deeply preoccupied over certain details of the vanishing life and a prescription for their regulation in the future in which they were not to exist. M. Loisy is, indeed, liable to be censured by the orthodox and the "liberals" alike for his explicit avowal that "It is very superfluous

to seek in the Gospel a doctrine of social economy, or even a program of moral conduct for individual existences which were to go on according to the order of nature, in the indefinite sequence of humanity.”<sup>1</sup> This seems to overlook the passage (Mt. xxv, 34-46) in which eternal life is promised to those who succour the distressed. Such a rule for conduct does seem to indicate some regard for the continuance of life on the normal lines. It is, we know, a simple adaptation from the ritual of the Egyptian BOOK OF THE DEAD, but it has had from many commentators even such praise for “originality” as M. Loisy has bestowed on the Teaching in general.

Such teaching is, in point of fact, quite undeserving of praise for “spirituality,” inasmuch as it in effect recommends benevolence as a way of securing eternal life. He who succours the distressed on the motive so supplied is plainly a long way below the Good Samaritan or the simple compassionate human being of everyday life. But this is really the ground-note of all the Gospel ethic. The Beatitudes are promises of compensatory bliss; and, indeed, in a system which founds upon immortality there is no escape from this kind of motivation. The Pagan appeal, made alternately to nobleness and to concern for good repute among one’s fellows, is clearly on the higher plane, and would tend to maintain, so far as mere moral appeal can, a nobler type of human being. It is not even clear, in the light of

<sup>1</sup> *Jésus et la tradition*, p. 141.

the general Judaism of the doctrine of the Kingdom, whether "one of these my brethren" can mean more than "one of the faith."

But however that may be, we have to note that for M. Loisy the promise of reward at the judgment for help given to the distressed is not a Jesuine utterance. It occurs only in Matthew; and we may readily agree that, if such an allocution were really delivered by the alleged Founder, it could not conceivably have been left to one collector to preserve it. "The redactor of the first Gospel," comments M. Loisy in his best critical vein, "thought he ought to put this here to complete his collection of instructions concerning the *parousia* and the great judgment. It is.....a piece in which is developed, from the point of view of the last judgment, the word of the Lord: 'He that receiveth you receiveth me.'" So that a teaching which still makes a great impression on the Christian consciousness is confessedly but a development by an unknown hand of a bare Messianic phrase. "It has been visibly arranged to close the compilation of discourses and parables made here by the redactor of the first Gospel."<sup>1</sup>

Yet when we come to the parable of the Good Samaritan, which occurs only in Luke, and which also cannot be conceived as being deliberately omitted by the previous evangelists if it had been uttered by the Master, M. Loisy indulges in a very long discourse that reads like a preserved sermon,

<sup>1</sup> *Les évangiles synoptiques*, ii, 482-83.



only to conclude that "the parable of the Samaritan thus offers itself as one of the most authentic testimonies [*un témoignage authentique entre tous*] of the teaching of Jesus. It is clear that the evangelist has not invented it, but that he has found it ready made, and that he has only given it a frame, in his fashion."<sup>1</sup> It is with a certain embarrassment over the spectacle of a good scholar's divagation that one proceeds to point to the absolute *non sequitur* in M. Loisy's comment. Supposing we agree that the evangelist found the parable ready made, wherein is this case differentiated from that of the passage in Matthew last noted? That is at least as likely to have been found ready made; yet it is not in that case claimed by M. Loisy that the passage is therefore a record of a real Jesuine utterance. He sees that it is a "patch," a development.

Now, the parable of the Good Samaritan is a plain documentary "patch," an insertion without context, between the address of Jesus to the disciples after that to the returned Seventy (whose mission M. Loisy had somewhat nervously dismissed as the evangelist's "figurative frame for the evangelizing of the pagans"<sup>2</sup>) and the resumption: "Now, as they went on their way....." It is impossible to imagine a more palpable insertion. First the mythic Seventy, the creation of a Gentilizing Christian, make their report on the exact lines of the report of the Twelve; then Jesus addresses

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* ii, 357.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* i, 152.

them; then he "rejoices in the Holy Spirit." Then, "turning to the disciples, he said *privately*, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see....." This last suggests an earlier allocution to the Twelve which has had to be turned into a "private" speech to them to distinguish it from the reply to the Seventy.<sup>1</sup> But however that may be, the natural sequel is verse 38, "Now, as they went on their way....." And it is between these points of natural connection that we get the parable episode beginning: "And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tempted him....."

Well may M. Loisy say that the episode is a thing "found ready made"; it has certainly no place in the original document. But it was "made" by a later hand, and it was inserted either by him who made it or by him who "found" it. It is the work of a Gentilizer, aiming at Jewish priests and Levites, and in a less degree at the scribes, whom he treats as comparatively open to instruction. It is part of the Gentilizing propaganda which evolved the story of the mission of the Seventy, and it is naturally inserted after that episode. But to admit *that* to be a work of redaction and to call the parable a genuine Jesuine utterance is only to give one more distressing illustration of the common collapse of the simplest principles of documentary criticism under the sway of conservative prepossession. M. Loisy retains the parable of the Good Samaritan as Jesuine simply because he feels that

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 127.

to abandon it is to come near making an end of the claim for the moral originality of the Gospels. It is probably from a Gentile hand, though it may conceivably have come from an enlightened Jew.

And so we find M. Loisy, with all his scholarly painstaking and his laudable measure of candour, presenting us finally with an uncritical result. His historical Jesus will not cohere. It is a blend of early Judaic eschatology with later ethical common sense, early Judaic humanity and particularism with later Gentile universalism ; even as the Gospels are a mosaic of a dozen other diverging and conflicting tendencies, early and late. "One can explain to oneself Jesus," exclaims M. Loisy ; "one cannot explain to oneself those who invented him."<sup>1</sup> Let the reader judge for himself whether M. Loisy has given us any explanation ; and whether, after our survey, there is any scientific difficulty in the conception of an imaginary personage produced, like an ideal photograph resulting from a whole series of superimposed portraits, by the continued travail of generations of men variously bent on picturing a Messiah for their hopes, a God for their salvation, and a Teacher for their lives.

<sup>1</sup> *Apropos d'histoire des religions*, p. 290.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE PAULINE PROBLEM

How much M. Loisy is swayed by prepossession may be further gathered from his argumentation over the "testimony of Paul" in connection with his criticism of the myth theory. Professor Drews, he remarks, does not follow those who contest the authenticity of the Epistles, "though the interest of his thesis imperiously demands it"; and again: "Paul is a dangerous witness for the mythic hypothesis."<sup>1</sup>

It may be worth while for me here to note that a study of the Pauline epistles, on the view that "the four" were probably genuine in the main, was a determining factor in my own resort to the mythical hypothesis. The critical situation created by realizing that Paul practically knew nothing of the Gospel narratives save the detachable item of the resurrection was for me almost exactly analogous to that created by realizing that the Israel of the Book of Judges knew nothing of the Pentateuchal life in the wilderness. So far from being a witness against the myth theory, the Pauline literature was one of the first clear grounds for that theory. The school of Van Manen can realize, what M. Loisy

<sup>1</sup> *Apropos d'histoire des religions*, pp. 291, 304.



cannot, that the spuriousness of the whole Pauline literature, so far from being "imperiously required" by the myth theory, sets up for that a certain complication.<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, Van Manen took exactly the converse view to that of M. Loisy:—

He was at bottom a man of conservative character, and it was only with great reluctance that he found himself compelled to abandon the Paul consecrated by tradition. But when, as a man of science, he had once made this sacrifice to his convictions, his belief in an historical Jesus received a fresh accession of strength; now at length the existence of Jesus had become probable. If the letters were written a century later than the time when Jesus lived, then his deification in the Pauline letters ceases to be so astonishing.<sup>2</sup>

Decidedly M. Loisy had been somewhat superficial in his estimate of the tendencies of the argument over Paul. Now, the myth theory, as it happens, is neither made nor marred by any decision as to the spuriousness of the Pauline letters. The crucial point is that, whether early or late—and the dating of them as pseudepigrapha is a difficult matter—the cardinal epistles *have been interpolated*. This became clear to me at an early stage in my studies, independently of any previous criticism. That the two passages, 1 Cor. xi, 23–28; xv, 3–11, are interpolations, and that in the second case *the interpolation has been added to*, are as clear results of pure documentary analysis as any in the

<sup>1</sup> Dr. G. A. van den Bergh van Eysinga, *Radical Views about the New Testament*, Eng. tr. 1912, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* pp. 101–2.

whole field of the discussion.<sup>1</sup> And when M. Loisy ascribes to Professor Drews an "entirely gratuitous hypothesis of interpolation," and implies that such hypotheses are set up because the texts are "extremely awkward for the mythic theory,"<sup>2</sup> he is himself misled by his *parti pris*. Whereas I came to my conclusions<sup>3</sup> as to interpolation while working towards the myth theory, exactly the same conclusions as mine, I afterwards found, had been previously reached by at least one continental scholar<sup>4</sup> who had not the mythic theory in view; and later by others<sup>5</sup> who equally stood aloof from it. M. Loisy would do well to ask himself whether it is not he who is uncritically swayed by his presuppositions, and whether the men to whom he imputes such bias are not the really disinterested critics.

In regard to the text of 1 Cor. xv, 3 sq., he describes as surprising the argument that the account of the appearance of Jesus to "five hundred at once" is shown to be late by its absence from the Gospels. This very silence of the evangelists, he insists, "renders unplausible [*invraisemblable*] the entirely gratuitous hypothesis of an interpolation."<sup>6</sup> One is driven to wonder what conception M. Loisy has formed of the manner of the compila-

<sup>1</sup> See *Christianity and Mythology*, 2nd ed. pp. 341, 357.

<sup>2</sup> *Apropos d'histoire des religions*, p. 294.

<sup>3</sup> First published in 1886.

<sup>4</sup> J. W. Straatman, in *Critical Studies on First Corinthians*, 1863-65, cited by Mr. Whittaker.

<sup>5</sup> W. Seufert, *Der Ursprung und die Bedeutung des Apostolates*, 1887, p. 46; Sir G. W. Cox, lect. in *Religious Systems of the World*, 3rd ed. p. 242.

<sup>6</sup> *Apropos d'histoire des religions*, p. 295.

tion of the Gospels. On his view, Paul had very early put in currency the record that the risen Jesus had appeared to "above five hundred brethren at once"; yet this record, so welcome to the Church, was never inserted in the Gospels. Why not? In M. Loisy's opinion, one of them, at least, was penned or redacted in the Pauline interest:—

One may *without doubt*.....affirm that the oldest of the synoptics, the Gospel of Mark, was composed, in a certain measure, in favour of Paul.....The same Gospel seems to have the conscious purpose of lowering the Galilean disciples to the advantage of Paul and his disciples.<sup>1</sup>

And while M. Loisy justly rejects, as opposed to the internal evidence, the claim that "Luke" is the intimate of Paul, and even denies that the third Gospel is really Pauline in tendency,<sup>2</sup> he will hardly say that it is anti-Pauline, or likely on that or any other score to repel an important item of testimony to the appearances of the risen Jesus, supplied by such an authority as the Apostle to the Gentiles. He can give no reason whatever, then, why the "five hundred" item should appear neither in Gospels nor Acts. It is in point of fact to be taken as a very late interpolation indeed. And if M. Loisy, as in duty bound, would but note the sequence: "then to *the twelve*; then.....to above five hundred..... then to *all the apostles*," he might, as simple critic, see that there have been successive tamperings.

As to the genuineness and the dating of the

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> *Les évangiles*, i, 172, 173. Contrast the case put long ago by Zeller, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Eng. tr. 1875, i, 129-30.

epistles, it may be well at this point to put the issue clearly. The general case of Van Manen is decidedly strong; and the entire absence from the Acts of any mention of any public epistle by Paul is all in Van Manen's favour. The Epistle to the Romans is so far dissolved under criticism that it might be classed as neither Pauline nor an epistle.<sup>1</sup> That there are late literary elements in the rest of the cardinal "four" I have myself argued,<sup>2</sup> independently of the question of the interpolations of quasi-history. For a free historical student there can be no primary question of how the dating of the epistles will affect the problem of the historicity of Jesus: the problem is to be scientifically solved on its merits. But while the school of Van Manen fail to recognize interpolations in the epistles as they stand, and to revise their chronology in the light of that fact, they are postponing the critical settlement. That the rejection of all the Pauline epistles as pseudepigraphic is not at all a counter stroke to the myth theory is shown by Mr. Whittaker's definite acceptance of both positions. Van Manen was premature on the historicity question.

Assuredly there is much to be done before the myth theory can be reduced to a definitive scientific form. It is to be hoped that, free as it is from perverting commitments, it may be developed rather more rapidly than the "liberal" theory of the human

<sup>1</sup> Compare, however, the elaborate essay of Prof. G. A. Deissmann, in his *Bible Studies* (Eng. tr. 1901), on "Letters and Epistles," p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> *Short History of Christianity*, 2nd ed. p. 4.



Christ, which has been on the stocks for over a hundred years without securing any higher measure of unanimity than exists among the Christian sects. But it can have no rapid acceptance. Questions of myth analogies—always open to the perverse handling of men who cannot or will not see that in mythology and anthropology claims of analogy are not claims of derivation—are apt to be obscure at best; and the establishment of the hypothesis of a pre-Christian Jesus cult has been admitted from the outset to be difficult. And the sociological history of the rise of Christianity, to which the myth question is but preparatory, has still to be written.

In this direction too there may be complications. Pastor Kalthoff's very important treatise on *THE RISE OF CHRISTIANITY* puts the theory that the Church began as a communistic body; and Karl Kautsky, in his *DER URSPRUNG DES CHRISTENTHUMS* (1908), has vigorously developed that conception. It has some strong grounds, and it is beset by very serious difficulties, which Kautsky, I think, has not met. When he denies that there were Hellenistic experiments and propagandas which in a later period could have set some Christian enthusiasts upon inventing a communistic beginning for the Church, he seems to ignore his own argument from the Epistle of James, and evidence which he could have found in Kalthoff. But unless the communistic theory (adumbrated long ago in De Quincey's rash thesis that the Essenes were the first Christians) is pressed as giving the *whole* origin of

Christianity, it remains a part rather of the sociological problem than of the hierological inquiry. And I do not think that Kalthoff, had he lived, would have so pressed it. He saw, I think, that there is a primary *religious* factor and problem, and that the other is secondary. There was a sacramental cult before there could be any communism. When the origin of the cult is made fairly clear the question of communism may be settled. But the Acts is a very dubious basis for a historical theory, and the Epistle of James tells rather of Ebionism than of communism. The history of the Ebionites and the Nazarenes, which for me was one of the points of reversion to a myth theory, seems to be the true starting point for the history of the Church.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE HISTORY OF THE DISCUSSION

IN all things, finally, one must be prepared for a boundless operation of the spirit of controversy, which is as it were the atmosphere of intellectual progress, and, like the physical atmosphere, is traversed by much dust, many gusts, and many persistent currents. An infinite quantity of mere insolence and mere personal aspersion arises round every problem that disturbs widespread prejudice: we have seen some of it even in a survey which aims solely at bringing out the main arguments on our issue. And where a body of doctrine is related to an economic foundation, controversy is sure to be specially protracted.

This has already been abundantly seen in the development of the "liberal" view of the human Christ, of which M. Loisy may be taken as an advanced representative; while Professor Schmiedel may rank as an exponent too advanced to be otherwise than suspect for some of the school. It is instructive to realize that M. Loisy stands to-day very much where Strauss did eighty years ago. What was then revolutionary heresy is now become a very respectable form of professional theology. Only in his old age did Strauss himself realize to

what philosophical conclusions his critical method led; and on the historicity question he seems to have made no serious advance at all. Challenged by Ullmann to say whether, on his theory, the Church created the Christ of the Gospels or he the Church, Strauss replied that the alternative was false, and that both things had happened; the Christ being created by the faith of the Church, which faith in turn was created by the person of the historical Jesus. From that gyratory position he never really departed; and that is the position of M. Loisy to-day.

If it has taken eighty years to yield only that amount of progress, through a whole library of laborious scholarly literature, there can be no great weight left in the appeal to scholarly authority. The authority of to-day is the heretic of our grandfathers' day. It is for the radical innovator, on the other hand, to learn the lesson which was not duly learned by his predecessors, unless it be that in some cases they were merely silenced by orthodox hostility. While many Freethinkers, probably, had come privately to the view of those intimates of Bolingbroke who are referred to by Voltaire as denying the historicity of Jesus, the two writers who first gave European vogue to the proposition, Dupuis and Volney, staked everything on the astronomical elements of the cult, and on the chief myth-analogies with Pagan religions. Their argument was both sound and important, so far as it went; but for lack of investigation on the Jewish side of the problem, and of the necessary analysis



of the Gospels, they failed to make any serious impression on the scholars, especially as so many Freethinking critics, down to Reimarus and Voltaire, treated the historicity of Jesus as certain.<sup>1</sup> And when an anonymous German writer in 1799 published a treatise on Revelation and Mythology in which, according to Strauss, he posited the whole life of Jesus as pre-conceived in Jewish myth and speculation, he made no impression on an age busily and vainly occupied with the so-called "rationalizing" of myths and miracles by reducing them to natural events misunderstood.

Later, another—or the same?—anonymous German, also cited by Strauss, in a review article condemned every attempt to find a historical basis for the Gospel myths; but in both cases the anonymity sufficiently told of the general resentment against any such view. And when Strauss himself, the first to handle the problem with an approach to scientific thoroughness, not only adhered to the central assumption of historicity, but argued confidently that the mythical dissolution of so many of the details made no difference to faith, it was natural that interest in his undertaking should slacken. The fact that it had ruined his career would perhaps count for still more. Freedom of academic discussion in Germany has never meant any minimizing of pious malice; and Strauss all

<sup>1</sup> Wieland was something of a Freethinker; but when Napoleon in the famous interview mooted the problem raised by Dupuis and Volney, Wieland treated it as pure absurdity. He was then an old man.

his life long had to bear his cross for the offence of a new advance in historical science.

Dr. Albert Schweitzer, who for almost the first time, after Schmiedel, has brought the note of amenity into the argument for historicity as against the negative, remarks that the greatest Lives of Jesus are those which have been written with hate—to wit, those by Reimarus and Strauss. Reimarus, whom Dr. Schweitzer genially overrates, was indeed given to invective against mythological personages, from Moses downward; but “hate” is a strange term to apply to the calm and judicial procedure of Strauss. As well ascribe to hate the rise of Unitarianism. If hate is to be the term for Strauss’s mood, what epithet is left for that of his opponents, who, as Dr. Schweitzer relates, circled him with unsleeping malignity to the end, and sought to ostracize the clerical friend of his youth who delivered an address over his grave? It is only historic religion that can foster and sustain such hates as these. It is true that Bruno Bauer, who so suddenly advanced upon Strauss’s position, detecting new elements of mythic construction in the Gospels, and arriving ten years later at the definite doctrine of non-historicity, exhibited a play of storm and stress in the earlier part of his inquiry. He reviled at that stage, not the Jesus whose “life” he was investigating, but the theologians who had so confounded confusion. “These outbreaks of bitterness,” Dr. Schweitzer admits, “are to be explained by the feeling of repulsion which German apologetic theology inspired in every genuinely

honest and thoughtful man by the methods which it adopted in opposing Strauss.”<sup>1</sup> Add that the same methods were being employed towards Bauer, and the case is perhaps simplified.

With these cases before him, and with the record to write of a hundred and thirty years of admittedly abortive discussion, Dr. Schweitzer could not forgo an exordium in praise of the “German temperament” which had so wonderfully kept the discussion going. Such a record seems a surprising ground for national pride; but it may be granted him that the German temperament will never lack material for self-panegyric, which appears to be the breath of its nostrils. To those, however, for whom science is independent of nationality, the lesson has a somewhat different aspect. What has been lacking is scientific thoroughness. Bruno Bauer’s flaws of mood and method were such that his more radical penetration of the problem at certain points made no such impression as did the orderly and temperate procedure of Strauss. “One might suppose that between the work of Strauss and that of Bauer there lay not five but fifty years—the critical work of a whole generation.”<sup>2</sup> “Bauer’s ‘Criticism of the Gospel History’ is worth a good dozen Lives of Jesus, because his work, as we are only now coming to recognize, after half a century, is the ablest and most complete collection of the difficulties of the Life of Jesus which is anywhere to be found.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Eng. tr. of *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*), 1910, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> Schweitzer, p. 151.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 159.

But his mood and his method not only made him fail to establish his mythical theory; they meant miscarriage in the very conception of it—a mere substitution of a subjective notion for the method of inductive science. Bauer's final way of putting the theory merely discredits it. He decides that the whole myth was the creation of one evangelist, whereby he shows that he is no mythologist. He never reached the true myth basis. After all, "the German temperament" seems to fall short, at some rather essential points, of the faculty for solving great historical problems; one feels it somewhat acutely when Dr. Schweitzer comes to the undertaking himself.

The great merit of Schweitzer's book is its manly and genial tone; though, as this is freely bestowed on the most extreme heretics, he may make another impression when he speaks of the "inconceivable stupidity" of the average Life of Jesus in the treatment of the connection of events. What his book mainly demonstrates is the laborious futility of the age-long discussion maintained by the professional theologians of Germany. When he comes to the latest developments, which are but extensions of the common-sense analyses of Bruno Bauer, he is full of admiration for criticisms which, I can testify, have occurred spontaneously to unpretending Free-thinkers with no claim to special training. Some of the most important myth elements in the Gospels—for instance, the story of Barabbas—he does not even glance at, having apparently, like the other specialists, never realized that there is anything there to explain.



By Dr. Schweitzer's account, the great mass of the German specialists for a century past have been unable to see contradictions and incompatibilities in the Gospels which leap to the eyes; to himself, Wrede's statement of some of them appears to be a revelation. It would seem that the simple old "Secularist" method of exposing these had covered ground which for the specialists was wholly unexplored. Thus it comes about that the myth theory, addressed to men who had never realized the character of their own perpetually conned documents, fared as it might have done if addressed to the Council of Trent.

Of no myth-theories save those of Bruno Bauer and Pastor Kalthoff, which alike ignore the clues of mythology and anthropology, does Dr. Schweitzer seem to have any knowledge. He is capable of giving a senseless account of a book he has not seen, and, it may be, of one he has seen. Of CHRISTIANITY AND MYTHOLOGY he alleges that "according to that work the Christ-myth is merely a form of the Krishna-myth"—a proposition which tells only of absolute ignorance concerning the book. If, as I suspect, he has no better ground for his account of Hennell's INQUIRY as "nothing more than Venturini's 'Non-miraculous History of the Great Prophet of Nazareth' tricked out with a fantastic paraphernalia of learning,"<sup>1</sup> it speaks ill for the regular functioning of his critical conscience. But where he has to deal with concrete arguments

<sup>1</sup> Work cited, p. 161.

he is straightforward, alert, and readily appreciative; and his survey as a whole leads up to a complete dismissal of the whole work of the liberal school so-called. In his summing-up, the only critical choice left is between "complete scepticism" and "complete eschatology"—that is, between the avowal that there is no evidence for a historical Jesus, and the conviction that the historical Jesus was purely and simply a Jewish "hero and dreamer," whose entire doctrine was the advent of the kingdom of God, the ending of the old order, in which consummation he *secretly* believed he was to figure as the Messiah.

The bare statement of the proposition hardly reveals its significance. Dr. Schweitzer's "dreamer" is not M. Loisy's, who is conceived as having had something to teach to his disciples, and even to the multitude. Dr. Schweitzer's Jesus has, indeed, disciples for no assignable reason, but he is expressly declared to be no Teacher, even as Wrede's Teacher is expressly declared to be no Messiah. The joint result is to leave the ground tolerably clear for the scientific myth theory, of which Dr. Schweitzer has not come within sight, having omitted to inquire about it. As he sums up:—

Supposing that only a half—nay, only a third—of the critical arguments which are common to Wrede and the "Sketch of the Life of Jesus" [by Schweitzer] are sound, *then the modern historical view of the history is wholly ruined*. The reader of Wrede's book cannot help feeling that here no quarter is given; and any one who goes carefully through the present writer's "Sketch" must come

to see that between the modern historical and the eschatological life of Jesus no compromise is possible.<sup>1</sup>

Let us see, then, to what the eschatological theory amounts, considered as a residual historical explanation.

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 329.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE GROUND CLEARED FOR THE MYTH THEORY

THE issue as between Schweitzer and Wrede comes to this. Wrede sees that the Messiahship is a creation following upon the belief in the resurrection, and only uncritically deducible from the documents. For him, Jesus is a Teacher who was made into a Messiah by his followers after his death, the Gospels being manipulated to conceal the fact that he made no Messianic claims. Schweitzer sees that the Teaching Jesus is a documentary construction; and that, unless the Crucified One had *some* Messianic idea, the Gospel story as a whole crumbles to nothing. And he asks:—

But how did the appearance of the risen Jesus suddenly become for them [the disciples] a proof of His Messiahship and the basis of their eschatology? That Wrede fails to explain, and so makes this "event" an "historical" miracle which in reality is harder to believe than the supernatural event.<sup>1</sup>

So be it: Wrede's thesis is here, after all, part of the common content of the "liberal" ideal, which cannot stand. But how does his critic make good the converse of a would-be Messiah who was no

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 343.



Teacher, but yet had disciples, and was finally crucified for making a *secret* Messianic claim? The answer is too naïve to be guessed. Accepting, in defiance of every suggestion of common sense, the story of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Dr. Schweitzer decides that "the episode was Messianic for Jesus, but not Messianic for the people." With no authority save the documents which at this point he radically and recklessly alters, he decides that the multitude had hailed Jesus "as the Prophet, as Elias," whatever the texts may say; and Jesus, feeling he was the Messiah, "played with his Messianic self-consciousness" all the while. Why, then, was he put to death? Simply because Judas betrayed his secret to the priests! Dr. Schweitzer can see well enough the futility of the betrayal story as it stands, inasmuch as Judas is paid to do what was not required—identifying a well-known public figure. But rather than admit myth here he will invent a better story for himself, and we get this: Jesus had dropped Messianic hints to his disciples, and Judas sold the information. And all the while none of the other disciples knew this, though at the trial the priests went among the people and induced them "not to agree to the Procurator's proposal. How? By telling them why He was condemned; by revealing to them the Messianic secret. That makes him at once from a prophet worthy of honour into a deluded enthusiast and blasphemer."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 395.

“ In the name of the Prophet, figs ! ” Dr. Schweitzer has, he believes, saved the character of “ the mob of Jerusalem ” at last ; and by what a device ! By assuming that to claim to be the Messiah was to blaspheme, which it certainly was *not*;<sup>1</sup> and by assuming that the mob who had (on Schweitzer’s view) acclaimed an Elias would be struck dumb with horror on being told that Elias claimed to be the Messiah. The secret of this psychosis is in Dr. Schweitzer’s sole possession, as is the explanation of the total absence of his statement from all the literature produced by the generation which, on his assumption, knew all about the case. And this is what is left after a survey of the German exegesis “ from Reimarus to Wrede.”

It is to be feared that neither the scholars nor the laity will accept either of Dr. Schweitzer’s alternatives, and that the nature of his own prestidigitatory solution may tend somewhat to weaken the effect of his indictment of the kaleidoscopic process which has hitherto passed as a solution among the experts. Dr. Schweitzer seems to realize all absurdities save his own. None the less, he has done a critical service in arguing down all the rest, though even in his final verdict he exhibits symptoms of the “ sacred disease,” the theologian’s malady of self-contradiction :—

The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who preached the ethic of the Kingdom of God, who founded the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and died to give His work

<sup>1</sup> Compare Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, p. 313.

its final consecration, *never had any existence*. He is a figure designed by rationalism,<sup>1</sup> endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb.....

*He passes by our time and returns to his own.....*

The historical foundation of Christianity as built up by rationalistic, by liberal, and by modern theology no longer exists; but that does not mean that Christianity has lost its historical foundation.....

Jesus means something to our world because a mighty spiritual force streams forth from Him *and flows through our time also*<sup>2</sup> .....

"Loves me, loves me not," as the little girls say in counting the flower petals. We seem entitled to suggest in the interests of simple science, as distinguished from Germanic *Kultur*, that temperament might perhaps usefully be left out of the debate; and that the question of what Jesus stands for may be left over till we have settled whether the film presented to us by Dr. Schweitzer can stand between us and a scientific criticism which assents to all of his verdict save the reservation in favour of his own thesis.

Meantime, let us not seem to suggest that the English handling of the historical problem during the nineteenth century has been any more scientific than the German. Hennell's treatment of it was but a simplification of Strauss's; and Thomas Scott's *Life of Jesus* was but an honest attempt to solidify Renan. In the early part of the nineteenth century little was achieved beyond the indispensable

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, the old German "rationalism" so-called, the theological method of compromise with reason.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* pp. 396-97.

weakening of the reign of superstition by critical propaganda. In early Victorian England, where Freethought had been left to unprofessional free-lances, still liable to brutal prosecution, an anonymous attempt was made to carry the matter further in a curious book entitled "The Existence of Christ Disproved by Irresistible Evidence, in a Series of Letters by a German Jew." It bears no date, but seems to have been published between 1841 and 1849, appearing serially in thirty penny weekly numbers, printed in Birmingham, and published in London by Hetherington. As Hetherington, who died in 1849, was imprisoned in 1840 for the "blasphemous libel" of publishing Haslam's *LETTERS TO THE CLERGY*, but not earlier or later on any similar charge, he would seem to have been allowed to publish this without molestation.

About the author I have no information. He writes English fluently and idiomatically, and had read Strauss in the original. But though he presses against Hennell the argument from the case of Apollos, latterly developed by Professor W. B. Smith with such scholarly skill, the book as a whole has little persuasive power. The author is one of the violent and vehement men who alone, in the day of persecution, were likely to hazard such a thesis; and he does it with an amount of vociferation much in excess of his critical effort or his knowledge. It made, and could make, no impression whatever on the educated world; and I never met any Freethinker who had seen or heard of it.

It is in another spirit, and in the light of a far



greater accumulation of evidence than was available in the first half of the last century, that the mythical theory has been restated in our day. In particular it proceeds upon a treasury of anthropological lore which was lacking to Bruno Bauer, as it was to Ghillany, who was so much better fitted than Bauer to profit by such light. As knowledge of the past gradually arranges itself into science, and the malice of religious resistance recedes from point to point before the sapping process of culture, the temper of the whole debate undergoes a transmutation. After a generation in which a Lyell could only in privacy avow his views as to the antiquity of man, came that in which Tylor, without polemic, could establish an anthropological method that was to mean the reduction of all religious phenomena, on a new line, to the status of natural phenomena. And even the malice of the bigoted faithful, which will subsist while the faith endures, falls into its place as one of these, equally with the malice of the conventional theorists who meet the exposure of their untenable positions with aspersion in defect of argument.

But the fact that a recent German exegete has been found capable of facing the problem in a spirit of scientific candour and good temper, and with something of the old-time detachment which made Rosenkranz marvel at Carlyle's tone towards Diderot, may be a promise of a more general resort to civilized controversial methods. In any case, the fact that a trained New Testament critic, undertaking to establish the historicity of Jesus, has

affirmed the scientific failure of *all* the preceding attempts, and offered a historic residuum which few will think worth an hour's consideration, seems a sufficient demonstration that the mythical theory is the real battleground of the future.

In that connection it is interesting to note that Sir J. G. Frazer, who has so warmly contended that, as history cannot be explained "without the influence of great men," we must accept the historicity of Jesus,<sup>1</sup> latterly propounds a tentative theory of a historic original for Osiris, whom he supposes to have been perhaps evolved from the idealized personality of an ancient King Khent, buried at Abydos.<sup>2</sup> It is a mere suggestion, and it at once evokes the reminder that, on the theorist's own general principles, King Khent may be regarded as having been theocratically identified with the already existing God. However that may be, the hypothesis does nothing to save Sir James's irrelevant plea about the operation of "great men" and "extraordinary minds" in the founding of all religions, for he does not suggest that King Khent's career in any way resembled the myth of Osiris, or that he first taught the things Osiris is said to have taught. So that, in the case of Osiris as of Jesus, the required great men and extraordinary minds may still, in the terms of the claim, be inserted at any point rather than in the personage named or

<sup>1</sup> *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, 3rd ed. (vols. v and vi of 3rd ed. of *The Golden Bough*) i, 312, note. See the passage discussed in *Christianity and Mythology*, 2nd ed. p. 281.

<sup>2</sup> *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, as cited, ii, 19 sq., and pref. to vol. i.

suggested as Founder.<sup>1</sup> If we agree to call the compiler of the Sermon on the Mount and the parables of the Kingdom and the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan great men and extraordinary minds, Sir James's very simple argument is turned. And we should still be left asking who were the historic founders of the cults of Zeus and Brahma and Attis and Adonis, Dionysos and Herakles and Krishna and Aphrodite and Artemis.

On the other hand, as it happens, that very suggestion as to King Khent points afresh to the myth theory as the solution of the Gospel problem. Nothing emerges oftener in Sir James's great survey than the ancient connection between kingship and liability to sacrifice. It will not avail to close off that connection by claiming King Khent as a potentate of an age after that of sacrificed kings. The sacrificial past would still have to be taken into account in explaining the deification of King Khent. And it is just an analogous process that is suggested in our theory of the Jesus myth. A long series of slain Jesuses, ritually put to death at an annual sacrament "for the sins of many," is the ultimate anthropological ground given for the special cultus out of which grew the mythical biography of the Gospels.

And if Sir James remains satisfied with his charge that in putting such a theory we "flatter the vanity of the vulgar," we may be permitted to ask him which line of propaganda is likeliest to

<sup>1</sup> Compare Prof. W. B. Smith's criticism of the "great man" theory as put by Von Soden—*Ecce Deus*, p. 9 sq.

appeal to the multitude. Let him, in his turn, be on his guard against the vulgarity which seeks support in science from popular prejudice. As to his pronouncement that the theory which he so inexpensively attacks "will find no favour with the philosophic historian," one must just point out that it does not lie with him to draw up the conclusions of philosophic history outside of his own great department, or even, for that matter, *in* that department. His own historical generalizations, when they seek to pass from the strictly anthropological to the sociological status, will often really not bear the slightest critical analysis. They express at times an entire failure to realize the nature of a historical process, offering as they do mere chance speculations which patently conflict with the whole mass of the evidence he has himself collected. It is not an isolated opinion that by such abortive attempts at "philosophic history" he has tended to lessen the usefulness even of that collection, for which all students are his grateful debtors. In short, he would do well to turn from his ill-timed incursion into dogmatics to the relevant problem which he has forced upon so many of his readers—namely, What has become of his mythological maxim that the ritual precedes the myth?

While the professed mythologist rejects the application of the myth theory to the current religion in the name of "philosophic history," students ostensibly more concerned about religion reject the historicity theory in the name of their religious ideals, finding in the myth theory the vindication



of these. Thus Professor Drews has from the first connected the argument of his *DAS CHRISTUSMYTHE* with a claim to regenerate religion by freeing it from anthropomorphism ; and I have seen other theistic pronouncements to the same effect ; to say nothing of the declarations of scholarly Churchmen that for them the Jesus of the Gospels is a God or nothing, and that for them the historicity argument has no religious value. Such positions seem to me, equation for equation, very sufficiently to balance the bias of Sir James Frazer. For my own part, I am content to maintain the theory in the name of science, and it is by scientific tests that I invite the reader to try it.

## CONCLUSION

ENOUGH has now been said to make it clear to the open-minded reader that the myth-theory is no wanton challenge to belief in a clear and credible historical narrative. It is not the advocates of the myth-theory who have raised the issue. The trouble began with the attempts of the believers to solve their own difficulties. Before the rise of criticism so-called we find them hating and burning each other in their quarrels over the meaning of their central sacrament. As soon as criticism began to work on the problem of the miracles and the contradictions in the narratives of these, they set themselves to frame "Harmonies" of the Gospels which only brought into clearer relief their discordance. After the spread of scientific views had shaken the belief in miracles, they set themselves, still as believers, to frame explanatory Lives of Jesus in which miracles were dissolved into hallucinations or natural episodes misunderstood; and, as before, no two explanations coincided. A "consensus of scholars" has never existed.

It was after a whole generation of German scholars had laboured to extract a historical Jesus from the Gospel mosaic that Strauss produced his powerful and sustained argument to show that most of the separate episodes which they had arbitrarily striven

to reduce to history were but operations of the mythopœic faculty, proceeding upon the mass of Jewish prophecy and legend under the impulse of the Messianic idea. Strauss was no wanton caviller, but a great critic, forced to his work by the failure of a multitude of *Gelehrten vom Fach* to extract a credible result from what they admitted to be, as it stood, a history in large part incredible.

Strauss, in turn, believing at once in a residual historical Jesus and in the perfect sufficiency of a mere ideal personage as a standard for men's lives and a basis for their churches, left but a new enigma to his successors. He had stripped the nominal Founder of a mass of mythic accretions, but, attempting no new portrait, left him undeniably more shadowy than before. Later "liberal" criticism, tacitly accepting Strauss's negations, set itself anew to extract from the Gospels, by a process of more or less conscientious documentary analysis, the "real" Jesus whom the critics and he agreed to have existed. Renan undertook to do as much in his famous "romance"; and German critics, who so characterized his work, produced for their part only much duller romances, devoid of Renan's wistful artistic charm. And, as before, every "biographer" in turn demurred to the results of the others.

It is the result of the utter inadequacy of all these attempts to solve the historical problem, and of the ever-growing sense of the inadequacy of a mere legendary construction to form a code for human life and a basis for a cosmic philosophy, that independent inquirers in various countries have set

about finding out the real historical process of the rise of Christianity, dismissing the worn-out convention. Small-minded conservatives at once exclaim, and will doubtless go on saying, that those who thus explain away the "historical Jesus," are moved by their antipathy to Christianity, and to theism in general. The assertion is childishly false. One of the leading exponents of the myth-theory gives his theism—or pantheism—as the primary inspiration of his work. The present writer, as he has more than once explained, began by way of writing a sociological history of the rise of Christianity on the foundation of a historical Jesus with twelve disciples—this long after coming to a completely naturalistic view of religion, which excluded theism. From such a point of view there was no *à priori* objection whatever to a historical Jesus. At one time he sketched a hypothesis of several successive Jesuses. The intangibility of any historical Jesus was the conclusion slowly forced by a long attempt to clear the historical starting-point, supposed to be irreducible.

Since that discovery was reached, the discrediting of the conventional view has been carried to the verge of nihilism by men who still posit a historical Jesus, but critically eliminate nearly every accepted detail, leaving only a choice between two shadowy and elusive historical concepts, even less tenable than those they reject. In the works of Schweitzer and Wrede, there is literally more direct and detailed destruction of Gospel-myth than had been attempted by almost any advocate of the myth-theory who had



preceded them ; though, as we have seen, it is not difficult to carry the process further. In the name of the historicity claim, they have gone on eliminating one by one myth elements where the myth-theorists had been content to recognize myth in mass. He who would re-establish the historical Jesus has to combat, first and foremost, the latest scientific champions of the belief in the historicity.

Those English critics who, like Dr. Conybeare, have declaimed so loudly of a consensus of critics and of historical common-sense on the side of a "historical Christ," are simply fulminating from the standpoint of the German "liberalism" of thirty years ago. Nine-tenths of what they violently affirm has been definitely and destructively rejected by the latest German representatives of the critical class, in the very name of the defence of the historicity of Jesus. Orthodox Germans, on the other hand, have been pointing out that the "liberal" view is no longer "modern," the really modern criticism having shown that the Gospel-figure is a God-figure or nothing. Vainly they hope to reinforce orthodoxy by the operations of a strict critical method.<sup>1</sup> Our English "liberal-conservatives," all the while, are fighting with obsolete (German) weapons, and in total ignorance of the real course of the campaign in recent years.

In such circumstances, those of us who did our thinking for ourselves, without waiting for new German leads, have perhaps some right to appeal

<sup>1</sup> See the brochure of Prof. R. H. Grützmacher, *Ist das liberale Jesusbild modern?* 1907.

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anew to readers to do the same. There is no race quarrel involved. But perhaps those students in the English-speaking countries who in the past have been wont to follow the German leads of the generation before their own, may now realize that they were unduly diffident, and proceed to make that use of their own faculties which Germans were always making from time to time.



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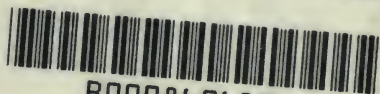
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